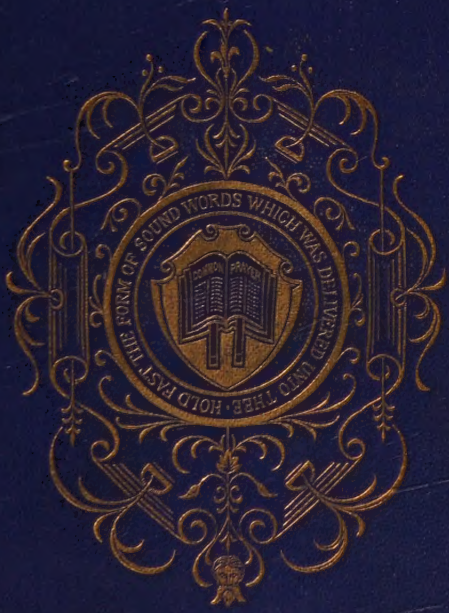
Church Echoes



A TALE
ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE SACRAMENTAL
AND SPECIAL SERVICES
OF THE PRAYER BOOK

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CHURCH ECHOES.

Church Echoes

A TALE

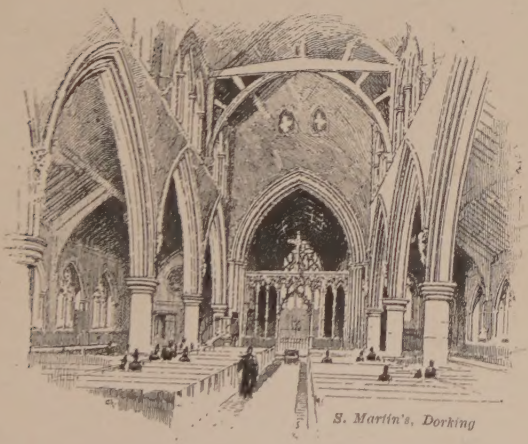
Illustrative of

the SACRAMENTAL *and* SPECIAL SERVICES *of the* BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

BY

MRS. CAREY BROCK

Author of 'SUNDAY ECHOES IN WEEKDAY HOURS'



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Church Echoes

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW CHURCH.

It was as bright a day as the fullest summer sunshine could make it, when a large number of people of various kinds were to be seen wending their way towards the same spot. Not for the first time, for years ago a very similar crowd was to be seen in the same place, and many of those who formed it then were the same as those who formed it now. Many changes, however, had taken place since then. Children had grown to be lusty youths and tall maidens, and young girls had become happy matrons; and even in the middle-aged, where the advance of years is less apparent than at any other time, some changes might be perceived, whilst elderly men and women had grown old, and were, many of them, led by the hand now by the very little ones whose toddling steps they had then helped to guide along the crowded streets, to witness, on the Feast of St. Simon and St. Jude, the laying of the foundation-stone of a new church about to be raised in the district of Little Burton.

But, changed as were some of those who once more assembled in this same spot, how much more changed was the spot itself!

It had been a bright autumnal afternoon when that foundation-stone had been laid. Many remembered—for

it had seemed to them as a pleasant presentiment—how, on that late day in October, the air had been strangely soft and genial, and the gloomy clouds, which for days had clothed every feature in the scene with a melancholy leaden hue, had suddenly given place to a bright sunshine which filled the air with a happy, healthful influence. But the brightness of that autumn day was as nothing compared to the midsummer light of this, when, on the Feast of St. John Baptist, the sun shone in all its beauty, not on smoky houses and untidy yards, but on the lofty walls and stately tower of as beautiful a modern church as could have been reared by the united efforts of Christian zeal, munificence, and art.

Foremost amidst the crowd assembled now to witness, on this 24th of June, the consecration of this beautiful new church, stood an old man who, on that 28th day of October, had stood almost in the same spot to witness the laying of its foundation-stone; but then he had stood alone, supported only by the strong stick which had been his firm friend for years; now, in addition to this support—for the old stick with its knobs was still held tightly in his left hand—his right hand was passed through the arm of a widow woman, a friend who was to him as a daughter: a tall, pale woman, advancing in years herself, but (so said those who knew her best) growing more youthful in heart and manner as her bodily frame became less erect and her hair more white. For some time now this widow woman, whose name was Grainger, had constituted herself the faithful attendant of the good old pensioner, David Graham.

'There they go!' exclaimed the old man, as a merry peal of bells from the great western tower made the air ring with a sudden chime; 'there they go!' and could his hands have been withdrawn from the support of stick or arm, he would have clasped them together in adoring thankfulness to Him who had allowed him to see this day.

'For I *do* see it,' he continued, speaking to himself rather than to his companion. 'I see it in my spirit, as the minister said, all the more clearly for the blindness of my poor old eyes, which sends my perceptions inwards to dwell there upon this blessed sight.'

And in spite of the inevitable blank that there must be in any face when its most expressive features have become vacant—though the withered hands could neither be folded together nor raised to heaven, and the uplifted eyes were sightless—there was something very expressive in the attitude of the venerable figure. It was bent with age, yet still dignified in bearing, and the unutterable look of perfect peace upon the strongly-marked and deeply-furrowed features plainly told that the characteristics of the soul within, the calm faith and perfect patience, the true resignation of will, and sweet restfulness of trust, had but been deepened by the fresh trial that within the last two years had come to David Graham.

Even to a passing observer, these inward characteristics were more manifest than any outward indications of frailty and decay in either the face or the figure of the old Christian soldier.

Recalling his thoughts as though by an effort to the scene before him, he turned towards his friend and said:

'Now tell me who you see. I shall want to think it all over by-and-by, and I must get it well by heart now. Who is there round us besides those that have been talking to me?'

'There's everybody, Master Graham; there's folks from all the streets, and there's loads more coming. I hope you won't get hurt. You know, master, Miss Helen did not wish you to come here.'

'I won't get hurt, never fear,' replied the old man; 'there's nobody here would press so hard as to do a bit of harm to David Graham. And we shall be going inside

soon. There's a place kept for us there where we shall be quiet enough. But I want to be here to see the goodly procession come along; to see it all through means of you. The Lord lets you be eyes to the blind. It's a good work to do for any of those whom He has afflicted thus. But what's this stir?' he asked, as the policeman's voice begged them 'kindly to make a little more room.'

'It's madam's chair coming, and the policeman wants to give her a good place,' said Mrs. Grainger, as she drew the old man further to one side to make way for an invalid wheel-chair, in which sat a young lady—so young a lady, and so fair, that it was sad to see the look of illness on her sweet face, and to feel that, young as she was, she had not the power which even old David Graham possessed to walk to that spot from her own house, short as was the distance. Nor could she have driven there, though carriages and horses were at her disposal, for the very easiest conveyance would have been too rough for such a delicate frame as hers had become.

But if this fact impressed others with a sense of sadness, it did not seem to have the same effect upon herself, to judge by the singularly happy look upon her face as she smiled to one and another in the crowd, and the cheerful tones of her voice as she bent her head, with caressing words, over the little child that sat on her knee, or turned to speak to the young girl walking beside the chair, which two footmen were conveying by the policeman's directions into the best position for seeing the expected procession pass.

Not that there was any need for the policeman's interference to secure that position: it was given gladly to 'young Mrs. Abbott;' for not only were there few in all that large assemblage who did not know that the beautiful church which to-day was to be consecrated had been raised amongst them chiefly by the munificence of Mr. William Abbott, but also there were few there who would

not gladly have resigned the best place to those two ladies for their own sweet sake and the love they bore to both of them.

A great contrast they looked to-day as, the chair safely placed close under the porch, both ladies turned to speak to the blind old pensioner, whom the good-natured policeman had now got comfortably into position beside it.

It needed but a word from each for him to recognise that one of the speakers was young Mrs. Abbott, and the other her greatest friend, Ruth Heathcote, the younger daughter of 'the minister,' as the old man habitually termed Mr. Heathcote, the Vicar of Little Burton.

But whilst old David Graham, without the help of his eyesight, was able instantly to recognise who these gentle ladies were, another spectator, standing close beside them, looking them full in the face, returning indeed the friendly recognition which both ladies, and especially the younger, had bestowed on her, was scarcely able to believe in their identity, though fully aware of it.

'It never can be Miss Ruth, Minnie,' was this good lady's remark to her companion, a tall, slight, singularly pretty girl. 'Why, she's grown into a woman.'

'I told you that you would not know her, auntie; and isn't she pretty!'

Pretty! I should think she was! I used to think, Minnie, when you came back from Little Burton with such grand accounts of your dear Miss Ruth's good looks, that I must make allowance for the coloured glasses through which your love for her led you to see her.'

'But you don't say so now, auntie?'

'No, indeed I don't. She's a lovely girl; and yet Mr. Graham declares Miss Helen to be the handsomer of the two — or, at least, so he thought a year ago, before his eyes grew too dim to know one from the other save by their voices.'

'Perhaps old David Graham is rather like young Minnie Davis,' said the girl, with a merry laugh; 'his favourite young lady seemed fairer to him than any other. But I believe Miss Helen is considered the handsomest by most people. She has more regular features, and is a great deal taller, and, oh! so stately. You'll see her directly, auntie; she is going to play the organ.'

'At such a grand service as they say we are to have to-day, Minnie?'

'Oh yes, auntie. Miss Helen could play the organ at any service. She is quite a first-class musician.'

But auntie, or, as we may more correctly call her, Mrs. Job Taylor, was not listening to her niece's remarks. Her eyes had fixed themselves now on the lady in the wheel-chair, and she said:

'And is that Mrs. Abbott? Poor thing! poor thing! Why, Minnie, three years ago she was as bonny as Miss Ruth; not so pretty, perhaps, but with as healthy a colour in her cheeks, and as clear a look in her eyes, and such a light, brisk walk. It seems to me I see her now when first Mr. William and she came back from their wedding-trip, and he brought her down to the factories to introduce her to the people. I remember it as well as if it were yesterday. And now to see her like that! Well, it is sad. And all through that unlucky accident.'

Minnie did not answer. She had seen and heard a good deal more of Mrs. William Abbott lately than Mrs. Job Taylor had, and she remembered also having once heard Miss Ruth say, when some one else had spoken of this same 'unfortunate' accident, that perhaps one ought not to call it so, since its results had been blessed to so many.

Before any further conversation could take place, however, a fresh peal from the bells, which had ceased for a while, sent all eyes in the same direction.

'We had better go into church now, auntie,' the girl

whispered. 'Places will be kept for Mrs. Abbott and old blind David, but we shall not get any if we delay.

Then came a hush both of bells and voices, and the petition was presented to the Bishop praying him to consecrate the church, and Mrs. Abbott's chair was softly wheeled in by the policeman himself, whilst Widow Grainger as softly guided old David's steps into the place provided for him close beside it.

The church was thronged to overflowing; many could not find entrance, although it held over a thousand. But there had been no difficulty in keeping these two places for the almost equally well-known and well-respected occupants who were to fill them, the 'master's lady' and blind David.

The old man's eyes were shut out now for ever from even the clear type of his large-lettered Prayer-book. But it was as dear to his heart as in former days, and he liked to know that it was at this moment in the hands of the faithful friend who was truly to him as a daughter.

He needed no help of book to enable him to follow every word of the twenty-fourth Psalm, so sweetly chanted by the choir and congregation, as the Bishop and clergy proceeded up the nave.

No one's heart could have been more full of reverence than was Widow Grainger's, and it required some very strong motive indeed to lead her to utter one word within church walls that was not either of prayer or praise. But so great was her desire that her old friend should not be prevented by his blindness from knowing all that was going on, that she could not refrain from whispering softly to him, in the pause that followed the chanting of this psalm:

'Mr. Abbott is giving the Bishop some papers. He is laying them on the communion table. I wish you could see his face.'

And truly Mr. Abbott's face was worth seeing. It was so full of reverent thankfulness—as well it might be.

As the Bishop turned to the congregation, and spoke of the devout and holy men who, moved by the secret inspiration of the Blessed Spirit, or by the express command of God, or by their own reason and sense of order and decency, had erected houses for the public worship of God, of such a character as to fill the minds of those who should worship in them with greater reverence for His glorious Majesty, and affect their hearts with more devotion and humility in His service, many eyes were turned towards Mr. Abbott. Many hearts blessed him for the pious work which he had been chiefly instrumental in bringing to this successful issue. For truly this church of St. Simon and St. Jude was a noble building. It had even been said by some that it was too noble a building to have been erected in such a place as Little Burton, where almost all the people were of quite a poor class, and very few amongst them understood much about the high and refined art which characterized every part of the building.

The remark had been made to old David Graham, who had answered simply :

'The rich and poor meet together; the Lord is the maker of them all. In God's house it does not seem to me as if one were better than another. The dear Saviour is no respecter of persons in redeeming the souls of men, nor the blessed Spirit in sanctifying them. But this noble church is not built only for man, but also for God, and who will say that any house can ever be reared for His glory that shall be too costly in price or too lovely to behold?'

CHAPTER II.

HOLY COMMUNION.

'You are very tired,' said Ruth Heathcote to Mrs. Abbott, as she arranged her pillows and shaded the light from the lamp with the delicate screen which she had herself painted for her—the last present to the friend whom she loved almost too fondly, with a love which enabled her perfectly to understand the affection which, for years, Minnie Davis had entertained for herself.

'You must not let Minnie make an idol of you, Ruth,' her mother had often said to her; and now that same tender, watchful mother said sometimes:

'You must not make an idol of Mrs. Abbott, Ruth.'

And though, at such times, Ruth would answer with a laugh, telling her mother 'that she must not be jealous, or suppose that anyone was going to steal away from her any of the love or reverence that was due to her,' yet she felt in her heart that the warning was not without reason, so intense was her devotion to her invalid friend.

'Not so very tired, Ruthie,' Mrs. Abbott answered, 'only I could not have remained up any longer. I feel sadly disappointed at not being able to be in the drawing-room when they come in from dinner, all the more because I know how much William would have liked me to be there. But I know I could not have kept up. Perhaps I ought not to have gone to the service, or remained for the celebration.

But I did so long to be there with you. It was a time that never would come again.'

'And it was a lovely time,' said Ruth. 'I am thankful you were able to come. And I am sure Mr. Abbott would rather have had you with us there than at dinner, or in the drawing-room this evening, only we must not talk about it now. You must lie quite still, and rest, and try to sleep, and then, when Mr. Abbott returns from showing the Bishop over the factories, you will be able to enjoy talking to him, and I am to go and entertain the Bishop. I, who have never spoken to a Bishop before in all my life! It ought to be Helen, the learned Miss Heathcote, not ignorant little me. But I will do my best.'

'You will not find him very different from other people, except in being more good, and gentle, and kind,' said Mrs. Abbott, who had known him all her life.

'Yes,' said Ruth, 'father says he is a typical Bishop.'

'And means by that,' said Mrs. Abbott, 'that he is just the type of what a Bishop should be—of what, thank God, so many of our English Bishops are: wise and good, full of sympathy for others, and yet full of wisdom to guide, and teach, and lead them on.'

Then, yielding to a fresh entreaty from Ruth, she consented to lie still, declining Ruth's offer to read to her, since, she said, her mind was too excited by the events of the day to be able to listen, but saying that she would remain quiet and see if great fatigue would not lead to sleep.

So Ruth took her book out of sight, and tried to read herself; but failing in the attempt, sat still and thought for nearly two hours, of many things and many people, all more or less connected with the consecration of the new church, but chiefly of the two special friends with whom the greater part of that eventful midsummer day had been passed: friends different in almost all respects—in rank, in character, in gifts—yet holding an almost equally warm place

in Ruth Heathcote's heart, Minnie Davis and Mrs. William Abbott.

The room had grown so still that Ruth could hear even the soft ticking of what was supposed to be a silent clock on the mantel-shelf, and she fancied that her charge must have been sleeping for some time, when a slight sound, followed by a very faint sigh, made her think she was mistaken; and going softly to the bedside she saw tears stealing down the pale cheeks: unmistakable tears, though they were brushed away at sight of Ruth, and she was greeted by a bright smile, and quite a mirthful inquiry as to whether she had not been very good to lie quiet so long.

'Margery should have been here to take a lesson from her mammie,' she said; 'poor restless little Margery, who often can't go to sleep because she won't remain long enough in one position to give herself a chance of doing so. I wish, Ruth,' she added, 'you would go and fetch her—otherwise William will be coming back, and I shall not see her before she goes to bed.'

Ruth went at once, and Mrs. Abbott, left alone, allowed the tears she had been restraining to fall unchecked. Then, drying them away, she was ready once more with the sweet smiles and cheerful tones to welcome her little daughter when she should come in, which she did not many minutes afterwards. Not in Ruth's arms, however, but in her father's.

A pretty picture they made, the fair-haired, fairy-figured little maiden clinging round the neck of her broad-chested, sturdy father.

'I have sent Ruth down to the Bishop,' he said, as he seated the little maid on the pillow beside her mother, and gave her his seals and watch-chain to play with.

As he did so, the contrast between the rosy face of the little blue-eyed maiden, all smiles and dimples, and the thin, pale face of her young mother, in which the lines were deepening daily, while the dark hair was becoming visibly

more streaked with gray, struck him painfully. But he checked the sigh and forced a smile.

'You can't think how prettily Ruth has decorated the table,' he said. 'Your own dainty fingers could not have arranged more tastefully the lovely flowers which her protégée brought her from Stapleton.'

He had meant to cheer her, but the remark struck upon a chord ready to vibrate at the faintest touch, and the tears which she had resolved he should not see sprang to her eyes.

'You are feeling ill,' he said. 'I ought not to have brought Margery.'

'Oh no,' she said, 'I wished to have her, and I am not at all worse. It is not that. I should *so* like to see them. I should so like to have arranged them.'

'Poor little woman,' he said tenderly; 'it is hard for you to be laid by in your own house like this, and to see others doing for you what no one can ever do as well.'

'Oh yes, they can,' she said, 'quite as well, and better. But do you know, William, I am such a naughty child; I am afraid I sometimes find *that* the hardest bit of all the trial. I used to delight in getting all things nice and pretty, and hearing people say that they were so—especially *you*. And now, as I lie useless here, and see everything going on as well without me, it is so hard to bear. It is wicked and selfish, I know, and I hate myself for it; and yet I cannot help feeling it.'

And her tears were falling fast when little Margery, who for some minutes past had dropped watch and seals on the bed, and had sat intently gazing on her mother in a state of utter bewilderment, suddenly burst out crying.

'Mother is not naughty. Mother is always good. *Is* mother naughty, daddy?'

Her father took her in his arms.

'Never,' he said. 'She is the best mother in all the

world, Margery. Daddy asks God every day to make his little Margery like her.'

And holding the child's dimpled face to her mother's pale one for a good-night kiss, he carried her off to bed.

When he returned the tears were entirely gone.

'It was very foolish,' she said; 'but one comfort is that you always understand me, and are never hard on me. I had not meant to give way, especially before you, but I was tired from this morning's exertion, and when the body is tired it gets the upper hand more readily. And this has been rather a special trial to me—all the more useful, no doubt, but not the easier to bear for that. You know I had such a great longing to have our Bishop as our guest.'

'I know you had,' he answered. 'I have been thinking very much about it as we went over the factories. I remember well, when he last stayed in the place, at the laying of the foundation-stone, your making him promise that he would stay with us when our new church should be consecrated.'

'And I was to go over the factories with him myself, and show him how much I had learned about them since I had been a manufacturer's wife. Was he interested in them, William? Could he understand anything about them?'

'He is always interested in everything that is of interest to other people,' replied her husband; 'anything, I mean, that is worth taking interest about. It would have delighted you to hear the questions he asked about everything—the machinery, the manner in which the chimneys consumed their own smoke, and numberless other things. I saw Preston listening to him with a most surprised expression of countenance.'

'I expect he was astonished to see that a Bishop could take interest in such matters.'

'I am sure he was; he will probably tell me so to-morrow.

He generally takes the first opportunity of letting me know what has been passing in his mind since we last met.'

'You and he are such friends,' she said.

'Yes,' he said, 'we are friends, and with good reason. No one has helped me as John Preston has done in carrying out what I think I may say is the chief object of my life, the thorough establishment of a good feeling between myself and my workpeople. I was saying so to the Bishop just now. He did not fail to remark Preston. No one with his quickness of discernment would do so, and he was much interested in hearing all I had to say about him.'

'That from being an unbeliever, and a leader of opposition to order and rule, he has become our most active Church worker, and the best help you have in getting every wise rule and every just decision carried out peaceably, but firmly,' said Mrs. Abbott. 'I wish I had been there to hear you praising him. There is no man in the district whom I like as well as I do John Preston. But you must not stay here talking of him or anybody else when it is time to dress for dinner.'

'If you were only coming down,' he said, as he lingered beside her.

'I should probably faint away and put everything and everybody into confusion, whereas I shall be quite happy, lying here, and seeing and hearing all that is going on by means of my own lively imagination. I am afraid I was in very low spirits when you came in. It was very wicked, very ungrateful, when God had just given me my heart's desire in letting me be strong enough to go to church to-day, and remain all the time. I had so longed to take part in that first Holy Communion in that beautiful church. And it was such a blessed time.'

She spoke eagerly, a little feverish weakness heightening her voice, and bringing the pink colour into her pale cheeks; but he did not like to check her, and she continued:

'I had never enjoyed any Holy Communion so much before. My Saviour had never seemed nearer to me. My heart was overflowing with love and gratitude to God, as I knelt with you and my other dear ones to receive the Bread and Wine in that church which for so many years has been the constant subject of our dearest hopes and most earnest prayers. But since then, lying here, murmuring, ungrateful thoughts have come to spoil my joy. I scarcely seem the same person now.'

'And yet,' he said, 'you are the very same. And—which is of far more consequence to remember—God is the very same. There is no change in Him, and no real change in you, only in a few external circumstances. Your feelings were strongly roused this morning, and consequently there is a reaction of physical depression. But the sun is shining quite as brightly now as then.'

'Only I cannot see it,' she said.

'And God does not ask you to see it, only to believe that it is there, and that you will see it again just as clearly when these clouds have passed away. We cannot be always on the mountain-tops, Maggie. But what we have seen there, and know we shall see again, must be our comfort when God, to try our faith, lets us go down into the dark valley. Your faith is very much tried, dear.'

'It is very good of God to send you to strengthen it,' she said. 'Talking to you has driven the clouds away, and I shall be as bright as any of you all the evening—probably brighter, for I am sure you must all be tired enough, after going through so much fatigue of body and mind, and it will be some hours yet before any of you can lay your head on a soft pillow like this, and rest comfortably, as I am going to do.'

It was true the pillows felt very soft, and the rest was most sweet, but it was her husband's love and the fulness of his sympathy that had made them so.

CHAPTER III.

HOLY COMMUNION.

MEANWHILE Ruth Heathcote was carrying on her conversation with the Bishop in the room beneath, and not finding it at all an arduous task. Helen could never have entered into that conversation with as much satisfaction to the Bishop as did 'little ignorant Ruth.' For the subject of it was their hostess, and who could talk of her and tell the story of her past sufferings and her present illness as Ruth could?

'It is all the result of that dreadful accident, your father tells me,' said the Bishop. 'I should like to hear more about it, for we were interrupted in our conversation before he could give me any details. I did just mention the subject to Mr. Abbott, but I saw at once that he shrank from entering on it.'

'He never speaks of it,' said Ruth, 'at least, never to anyone but herself.'

'Not even to you, who he tells me are her greatest friend.'

A warm flush of pleasure passed over Ruth's face, and made her look indeed what Mrs. Job Taylor had called her that morning, a very lovely girl. Loving young Mrs. Abbott as devotedly as she did, it gave her a warm feeling at her very heart to know that her affection for her should be thus distinguished from all other by her husband, and to the Bishop.

'No,' she answered, 'not even to me. He never seems

as though he could talk enough of her, or of her illness. Indeed, he scarcely ever talks to me of anything else, but he never alludes to its cause.'

'Which was an accident out riding, I know,' said the Bishop; 'but I have never exactly understood how it happened.'

'I was not there,' said Ruth, 'but my sister was, and she has often described it to me, going over every detail until I almost fancy that I saw it myself.'

'It happened in the neighbouring street, where the hill is so steep, your father tells me; a terrible place for a tender creature like her to be thrown from her horse in.'

'You must have passed the very spot,' said Ruth, speaking eagerly, and forgetting her preconceived awe of her companion in the presence of the kind eyes that were looking at her, full of expectant sympathy for her reply. 'I heard Mr. Abbott say that you went to the factory in Birmingham Road.'

'Yes,' he said, 'a large factory standing a little back from the street, in a paved court, surrounded by railings.'

'It was there she fell,' continued Ruth; 'father says one of the first thoughts that entered his mind afterwards was how Mr. Abbott would ever be able to pass the place again. But he went past it the very next day. John Preston, who was with him, wanted him to go round another way.'

'John Preston!' interrupted the Bishop; 'that was the name of the man I saw to-day, of whom Mr. Abbott spoke so highly.'

'He is the superintendent of the works,' said Ruth, 'and he went with him the day after the accident to the Birmingham Road factory. Mr. Abbott spoke about it to *him* that day, but he has never done so since. John wanted him to go through some other streets and enter by a back way, but Mr. Abbott refused. He said if he did not pass by that spot then, he never might have courage to do so

again. And John says that though his face was quite livid, and he could never forget his look, his step was as firm as ever, and no sooner had they crossed the street than he began to talk to him about the business they had to do at the factory.'

'Just like him,' said the Bishop; 'but tell me about the accident. The horse took fright, I suppose.'

'He started from our door in Manchester Street,' replied Ruth. 'They had called for Helen, who was to ride with them, and were waiting while she mounted. Mrs. Abbott's horse was very fresh, for the weather had been so bad that he had not been out of the stable for days. She thinks that she must have touched him accidentally with her whip, though she cannot remember doing so, for he suddenly started off at a gallop without any apparent reason.'

'And she could not check him?'

'They say she might have done so, if unfortunately just at that moment a German band had not struck up round the corner, quite close to him; and this set him off at a furious pace down the hill, which is so steep just below our house. She lost all control of him, though she kept her seat in a way that they say was most wonderful, until he reached that bit of slippery pavement in front of the factory, and there he fell, throwing her against the railings.'

'It distresses you to speak of it,' said the Bishop, as Ruth paused for an instant in her rapid, eager talking.

'Oh no, I like to tell you about it. She was stunned by the fall. They thought that she was dead when first they raised her. There was only one blow, just upon the temple. She was taken into the house close by, and there she remained between life and death for three weeks. Mr. Abbott never left her. They say he never seemed to sleep, though of course he must have done so.'

'And then?' the Bishop asked.

'Then she rallied, and seemed to be recovering. The

doctors were hopeful of her getting quite well. After some weeks she was taken home in an invalid carriage, and every day we grew more happy about her. She even went out once, but there was something wrong which they could not discover, and she gradually lost her walking powers. It is many months now since she has walked a step, and she is very, very weak, especially in her head, but otherwise she does not suffer.'

'Poor young thing,' said the Bishop, 'poor dear young thing! It must be a terrible sorrow for them both.'

And he would have continued the subject had it not been interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Abbott. It had evidently made a great impression on his mind, however. Many times during the evening Ruth felt sure that he was thinking of it by the expression of his face as he looked at Mr. Abbott, and the tone of his voice when he mentioned his wife's name to him.

Later in the evening Mr. Abbott went away to see how his wife was, and Ruth was left again alone with the Bishop.

'Has your friend told you,' he asked, 'that she is to receive the Holy Communion to-morrow before I leave? Shall you be with her?'

'No,' said Ruth. 'She wished me to be, but I was at the Celebration to-day. It was my brother's first Communion, besides being the first celebration in our new church.'

'So your father told me; but why should you not also join us to-morrow, since your friend wishes it? I hope you will.'

Ruth grew very red, and could not answer. She had been surprised to find her tongue running on so glibly in talking of her friend; but she could not speak so freely when the subject concerned herself.

'I do not know,' she said; 'I will ask father.'

'Yes,' he said; 'you cannot do better than ask him.'

And to Ruth's relief, Mr. Abbott's return, after finding that his wife was asleep, put an end to any further conversation on this subject.

It was renewed, however, later in the evening, when she wished them good-night, to return home; Mr. Abbott himself making the same request and receiving the same answer, the Bishop added:

'And I quite hope we shall meet again then. If we are constantly in a state of preparation, what is to prevent our receiving the Holy Communion at any moment when opportunity occurs?'

'A very sweet girl,' was the Bishop's first remark, as Mr. Abbott returned to the drawing-room after seeing Ruth off under her brother's care. 'I am not surprised at your wife's regard for her.'

'She loves her like a sister. Indeed, she is one to her,' replied Mr. Abbott. 'My wife had been very anxious that she should join us to-morrow in partaking of the Lord's Supper, or, as she would say, in Holy Communion.'

'Or, as your young friend said herself just now, at our proposed "Celebration"—different names for the same service—the service of the Holy Eucharist, the chief of all Christian services, the highest act of Divine worship.'

'I have wondered sometimes which was the most correct name for the service,' continued Mr. Abbott, finding it quite as easy to speak freely to the Bishop as Ruth had done. 'My mother always spoke of it as receiving the Lord's Supper, and I had the habit of saying so also before I ever partook of it myself. I have had very little Church education—none, indeed, but what I have received here as a grown-up man under Heathcote's influence. But I suppose all these names mean one and the same thing.'

'Or rather,' said the Bishop, 'they define in different ways one and the same holy service, for the names all have different meanings, pointing in various ways either to its

origin, its object, or its use. The title to which you say you have been accustomed is probably the one which was used by the Primitive Church.'

'St. Paul makes use of this term in his Epistle to the Corinthians,' remarked Mr. Abbott.

'Yes,' replied the Bishop, 'he does, in the eleventh chapter of his second epistle; but the feast to which he refers was the Agape, or love-feast, of the Primitive Church, and this preceded the administration of the Holy Communion. The name given to the rite, as well as to the office for its celebration, in the earliest times, was the Liturgy—a word derived from the Greek, and signifying a public service. In the Septuagint, or Greek translation of the Old Testament, as you probably know, we find this word used in the twelfth and twenty-sixth verses of the fourth chapter of Numbers for the public service of the Sanctuary.'

Mr. Abbott did not know, and said so, but he showed such evident interest in the subject that the Bishop continued:

'Later on, in the Mediæval Church—the Church of the Middle Ages—this service was called *Missa*.'

'Why?' asked Mr. Abbott. 'It sounds like Mass—the name Romanists give to the service.'

'It is the same name now, corrupted into Mass. It has little meaning, and seems to have been derived merely from the words, "Ite, missa est" ("Go, the service is finished"), which were used at the end of the ante-Communion service in dismissing the catechumens and other non-communicants. It was only in 1552, when our Prayer-Book was revised, that the name of Mass was dropped, in consequence of the corrupt practices which had crept into the service. As you say, it is still used in the Church of Rome; but the most usual titles now are the Lord's Supper, so called, of course, because our Lord Himself

instituted it on the evening before His sacrifice upon the Cross; and Holy Communion, because, by rightly partaking of it, we are united with Christ, and through Him with all our fellow-worshippers.'

'Holy Communion is the title my wife is so fond of,' replied Mr. Abbott. 'She has a heart full of love to Christ and man, and she often tells me that she never feels such a full realization of her fellowship both with her Saviour and her fellow-Christians as she does when participating in these sacred mysteries.'

It had surprised Mr. Abbott very much in the earlier part of that same day to see the real interest with which the Bishop had entered into the working of the various parts of his mill machinery. Now it surprised him still more to find himself talking thus freely of subjects connected with the Church of which the Bishop was a chief pastor, and knew so much, and of which he felt himself to be such an unworthy member, and knew so little.

'Perhaps,' replied the Bishop, 'it is the title which explains more fully than any other the object of our Lord in instituting the service, and its blessed results to our own souls. Through no other means can we draw so near to Christ in faith and penitence, and in no other way can our souls be knit as closely with the souls of those united to us in the bonds not only of earthly, but of heavenly, relationship. The title of "Eucharist,"' he added, 'comes from a Greek word which is used both by St. Luke and St. Paul in their accounts of this Institution. It signifies thanksgiving, and was probably given to the Holy Communion with reference to the giving of thanks by our Lord when He consecrated the Bread and Wine and the Holy Communion is the great Thanksgiving Service of the Church.'

CHAPTER IV.

HOLY COMMUNION.

'I DO not like to promise,' said Herbert Heathcote to his sister Helen, as they lingered together on this lovely August evening under the pleasant trees which shaded one side of the large garden which now stood in the very centre of the district of Little Burton—Mr. Abbott's last and most successful arrangement for the pleasure of the workpeople. 'I do not like to promise.'

'I wish you would,' she answered; 'it would be such a help to you. There is no help like it,' she added earnestly. 'We come in weakness, and we find strength. Our sins seem so great, the burden of them is, just as the service says, intolerable; but when we come to the Holy Communion, and lay them there at the feet of our Lord, He takes the load away. He comes so very close to us in this Sacrament, it almost seems as though we could see Him, with the marks of the nails in His hands, lifting the load from us and carrying it Himself.'

To no one, perhaps, except to Herbert—unless, indeed, it had been to her dear old blind friend, David Graham—could Helen Heathcote have spoken thus freely on such a solemn subject. On no other day, perhaps, could she have spoken thus freely even to Herbert. But he was leaving her to-morrow for a six months' residence in London, and her heart, which had clung to him from his childhood with more

anxious tenacity than to any other being, was full of fears and doubts concerning him.

The boy was touched by her earnestness.

'But I may find it harder to be good, Helen, when I am in London than it is here, or even than it was at school, where it was often hard enough; and if I am led into any wrongdoing, I could not keep my promise then. I could not come to the Holy Communion.'

'Not if you were not sorry, Herbert; not if you wished to go on doing wrong. But I am sure that would never be the case with you. No doubt you will do wrong sometimes. Who is there that does not? But I am sure you would be sorry for it afterwards, and would wish to be forgiven, and not to do it again. And you know, Herbert, in coming to the Holy Communion, we receive the forgiveness of our past sins and the strength to forsake them. The Exhortation tells us so.'

Herbert was silent for some time; then, evidently carrying on some train of thought that had been passing in his own mind, he said:

'Mrs. Grainger asked me to-day, Helen, when I went in there to say good-bye to John, if I knew why some of the boys belonging to the Bible-class did not come to the Communion yesterday, though they had given in their names to father.'

'I don't see that it is any business of Mrs. Grainger's,' Helen replied rather proudly.

'I don't think she meant to be interfering. She seemed quite unhappy about it. She takes such an interest in those fellows now she has charge of the Mission room. John is for ever laughing at her, and saying he hopes she does not expect him to consider them his brothers, because she evidently looks upon them as her sons. The poor thing was almost crying when she asked me if I could tell her why father did not let several of them come, who seemed to her good steady lads.'

'Perhaps some of them had been quarrelling,' suggested Helen, 'and were not in love and charity with their neighbours.'

'She had thought of that, but she said that could not be the reason; for though Stevens and Hatton had had a regular row about something in the choir, father had let Stevens come, but not Hatton.'

'Well,' said Helen, who was more interested in Herbert's own feelings on the subject at this moment than in any other's, 'it's no business of ours, or of Mrs. Grainger's either. One thing we may be sure of, and that is, that father would never keep anyone away without some very good reason, and that he would wish everyone to come who was trying to do right and really believed in the Lord.'

Notwithstanding these convictions, however, the subject troubled Helen's mind until she could mention it to her father himself, who made it clear to her in a very few words, and told her to explain it to Mrs. Grainger—which Helen was at first somewhat reluctant to do, until he showed her that, although it might have been better if Mrs. Grainger had trusted the matter entirely to her clergyman, her remarks were not prompted by self-conceit, but only by her real interest in the Mission-room lads. So when Herbert went that evening to say good-bye to old David Graham, she took the opportunity of accompanying him, and went into Mrs. Grainger's room to set her mind at ease about her boys.

'I see—I see now, Miss Helen,' she said, as Helen briefly explained why Stevens had been admitted to Holy Communion and Hatton rejected. 'You see, I did not know the circumstances. I had no idea that Stevens had tried to make up with Hatton, and had said how sorry he was (though really, miss, he was much the least to blame), or that Hatton had refused to shake hands and forgive and forget. Of course, I understand it now. But those two

nice lads who have come from Birmingham, Miss Helen, I was real sorry for them. I like them both so much, and they're strangers too.'

'That is just it, Mrs. Grainger. My father hopes to see them both at Holy Communion very soon; but he knows nothing about them, and must make inquiries first.'

'I am sure he must know that Dan Grove is a good lad, Miss Helen,' persisted Mrs. Grainger. 'John Preston told me something about him which proves it, and he said he had told the Vicar of it also.'

The colour rose to Helen's forehead, and she needed to remember not only her father's advice, but also the special claim which Mrs. Grainger's extreme goodness to her dear old David gave her for being patient with her.

'My father has formed just as good an opinion of Dan Grove as you have, Mrs. Grainger. But he knows, what perhaps you do not, that he has never been confirmed. He is to be at the next Confirmation, and my father has made him understand that he had better wait till then. So now I hope you may make yourself happy about your boys, and that it will not be long before you see them, one and all, at the Communion—if you can use your influence in bringing Hatton to a better state of mind.'

'I hope I may, Miss Helen, and thank you for talking to me as you have. I am afraid you think I ought not to have said anything about it, and I know I was wrong to speak to Master Herbert. You'll please excuse it, miss, and ask the Vicar to do so too, since he has come to know of it. Mr. Graham often tells me that I worry myself a deal too much about other folks' affairs—folks that I love and am anxious about. I'm afraid it's a sad failing. I am quite sure that a little faith is of more use to us than a whole world of thinking and fussing and fretting. But it's my nature to worry myself over everyone's faults—even my own, though there's more sense and safety in *that*.'

'If we don't carry it too far, Mrs. Grainger,' said Helen, fully able to sympathize in this; 'for if we do, then, like other good things carried to excess, it becomes an evil.'

'So it does, Miss Helen—so it does. Mr. Graham often says that too. Many's the time he has told me that I reminded him of a friend of his, who made himself into a downright invalid by his fears and fancies. He was for ever feeling his pulse and looking at his tongue, and thinking he had got this or that the matter with him, until Mr. Graham says he might as well have had the maladies as trouble himself so much about them, until he had not time or strength left to do anything he might have been doing for himself or anybody else. My Johnnie's tempted that way too, Miss Helen; but it has done him a world of good to be living all this while with Mr. Graham.'

It certainly had. John Grainger was a different lad altogether since he and his mother had been living under the same roof with the old pensioner, in order that they both might minister to the many necessities which his infirmity involved.

In spite of all her efforts, Helen Heathcote could not succeed in obtaining from her young brother the promise she so much desired.

She urged it again that night, lingering in his room, after the last of his things had been carefully packed by her own hand, and his portmanteau was locked and strapped in readiness for the early start next morning.

'I feel so grieved,' she said, 'so disappointed. I should have thought you would have learned enough from all that father has taught us on the subject to make you ready to promise that you would be regular in your attendance.'

'I have learned enough, Helen, to know what a serious thing it is to promise about. My father did not ask for a positive promise. Why, the first Collect as he has ex-

plained it over and over again to us, is enough to make any fellow think gravely about it.'

'The service begins with the Lord's Prayer,' said Helen. 'Father says that only our Lord's own words ought to begin such a service; but you mean the Collect for Purity, I suppose.'

'Yes,' he replied; 'and if you had heard all that father said to us only last night on that subject, perhaps you would enter more into my feeling about the Holy Communion. I don't think you girls know what temptations we boys have. Why, you never get a bad book thrown in your way, or hear a bad word. At school—even the best schools—one hears no end of bad language, and bad words bring bad thoughts. And as for bad books, there is not a half-year that some fellow does not bring some and tempt the others to read them. Not that that is such a temptation to me as to many, for I don't care for reading, even story-books. But for all that, it's harder for boys to keep their minds pure than it is for girls by a long way.'

Helen looked up into her brother's young face with a smile in which love, sympathy and thankfulness were very equally mingled. People were in the habit of calling hers rather a severe face. It did not seem so now, with this sweet grateful look resting on it, brought there by the happiness it gave her to see her young brother thus truly in earnest in his desire to serve God.

'I can indeed imagine its being very hard,' she said. 'The more need, Herbert, to pray to God to cleanse the very thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit. I have often thought that it was a great blessing that this Collect came just before the reading of the Ten Commandments.'

'Why?' asked Herbert.

'Because it teaches us where to go for help in order to love God, and live so as to bring praise to His Holy Name

before we hear that Law read which it is so hard to keep. And yet it is only by keeping it that we can walk rightly. I thought of you, Herbert, and your new life in London, when father preached to the Confirmation candidates from the text: "How shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word." Do you know, I believe he was thinking greatly of you when he chose that particular text.'

'I know he was. He told me so,' said Herbert.

'Father has always longed so much for us to have a great reverence for God's Word,' continued Helen. 'Even when we were little tiny children, before we could read, don't you recollect how he would never let us treat a Bible as if it were any other book?'

'Yes, I remember,' said Herbert. 'I'm afraid it has only been very lately that I have thought much about it myself. But one gets into habits, and I never have put anything down on a Bible, because of father's having been so particular about it.'

'It is a great thing to be taught reverence as a habit before one learns to feel it for one's self,' said Helen. 'I remember father's telling us once at a Communion class how, in ancient times, the priest used to wash his hands, in the sight of the people, before this public reading of the Ten Commandments.'

'It must have looked very strange,' said Herbert, with a smile.

'It would seem so to us, but I suppose the people were accustomed to it, and I think it must have impressed on their minds a great respect for God's Law, and helped to make them understand the necessity for examining themselves by it before coming to the Holy Table. Father says that it was when this custom was discontinued that this Collect for Purity was substituted in its place. You know, Herbert, we stand up when the Gospel is read.'

'But not at the epistle,' said Herbert.

'The Gospel generally contains some portion of our Lord's own words,' said Helen, 'and it used to be the custom in old times always to stand up when any of these were read.'

'You are very fond of talking of old times,' said Herbert. 'Almost as fond as old David himself.'

Helen smiled, as she answered:

'I think it is old David who has made me value ancient things so much, especially in connection with our Church and our Church services. But I always liked them, Herbert, even before I was so fond of David, and I think the knowledge of former customs helps one immensely to understand present things, showing us why they were first established, and what has led to the changes.'

'The Roman Catholic clerk at our office says that the Romish Church is the oldest Church in the world,' said Herbert; 'that it is a great deal older than ours. I knew he was quite wrong, and told him so, for I have often heard father say that our Church is a true branch of the Holy Catholic Church, founded by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. But, of course, I could not explain it to him. I never can explain things — I am not clever enough. I often wish I were.'

'Better be good than clever,' said Helen gaily.

'A good thing to be both,' he answered.

'Like you,' he would have added, only that he knew Helen was not fond of being praised to her face, so he only said:

We should be still better friends than we are now.'

She looked at him with a face full of love.

'Is that possible, Herbert? Do you really think, now, that I could love you better than I do if you were as clever as——'

She hesitated, and Herbert said:

'As clever as Charlie Preston; I think he's about the cleverest young fellow I know.'

'Well, then, as clever as Charlie Preston. If you were, do you really think you would be a bit dearer to me than you are now?'

Herbert turned round and kissed her.

'No, I don't,' he said.

He was not of a demonstrative nature, nor was his sister Helen. But they loved each other with intense affection, and this was to be their last evening together for many months.

CHAPTER V.

HOLY COMMUNION.

'GLORY be to Thee, O Lord! Thanks be to Thee, O God!' repeated old David Graham aloud, as he seated himself once more in his armchair on his return from that first Celebration in the beautiful church which his prayers had helped to raise in the district of Little Burton.

Perhaps no words in all the service had gone up from the old pensioner's heart with more fervour than these two short versicles preceding and following the reading of the Holy Gospel.

All through the service he had repeated them many times over, and now he uttered them aloud. He would have done so probably just the same had he known that Widow Grainger had come into the room, but he was not aware of her presence until she interrupted his soliloquy, which was evidently very absorbing, with the remark that it had been a delightful service.

'I am glad it was decided for Midsummer Day,' she said; 'everything seemed so appropriate, especially the Collect. I thought, as the Vicar read it, what a true follower he was himself of St. John Baptist in trying to prepare the way of our Saviour by preaching repentance.'

'Yes,' said David, 'and we may say, too, that never did anyone strive harder to follow his doctrine and holy life, and the example he sets before us, constantly speaking the truth and boldly rebuking vice, and patiently suffering

for the truth's sake. I believe there is nothing the minister would not endure, if by bearing it he could advance the cause of truth. You are quite right, Mrs. Grainger; the minister is in himself an illustration of that Collect.'

'I love the Collects,' said the widow; 'they say so much in so few words, as if a whole quantity of prayers went up to God in one short supplication.'

'Which is just what they do,' replied old David, 'and just, too, one reason why they are called Collects, because they collect together the prayers of many people into one prayer offered up by the priest.'

'So they do,' said the widow. 'I am sure that is true of the Litany Collects.'

'Yes,' said David; 'they sum up as it were all the prayers that have gone before. And these Collects in the Holy Communion Service do so also, gathering into a few words the especial teaching of the Epistle and Gospel.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Grainger thoughtfully.

It was a new idea to her, and she liked new ideas. A great many had come to her mind concerning the Church Service since she had been the daily companion of the old blind soldier, who so delighted in it.

'I shall always remember now why these prayers are called Collects,' she said; 'they are very full, though they are so short.'

'And so complete,' said the old man; 'short as they are, they contain every necessary part of a true prayer. There is the "Invocation," the address, generally to the First Person of the Holy Trinity; and the "Petition," some special request offered at the footstool of His Majesty; and the "Mediation," the seeking of our Lord's intercession to make our prayer acceptable; and the "Ascription." That, you know, means the rendering up of glory to God.'

Mrs. Grainger did not know, but she was very pleased to learn.

Fixing her thoughtful eyes on old David's face, in which even the sightless eyeballs could not dim the expression of extreme intelligence, she said:

'It's a great thing for you, Mr. Graham, to know so much about your Prayer-book.'

'It's only been since the minister came here that I've learned what I know,' he answered. 'I've loved my Prayer-book for years, and valued it too; but I've loved and valued it more than ever, and understood it better too, since I've known more about it, and especially how old it is.'

'You're just like my Johnnie in loving what is old,' said the widow; 'he's for ever telling me something you've told him, or that he has picked up for himself, about what he calls the antiquity of this or that custom. He was explaining to me only last night why one of the creeds was called Athanasian, and the other the Apostles' Creed, and the one we repeat in the Communion Service, I've forgot the name.'

'"Nicene," mother,' said Johnnie himself, coming into the room at the moment with his somewhat grave young face brightened by the pleasure it gave him to hear his mother repeating to old Mr. Graham part of the conversation in which he had been trying to interest her on the previous Sunday evening. For though Mrs. Grainger truly loved her Church, and its services, and her clergyman, and, most of all, her Bible, she was not much given to what she called 'book-learning,' and was content generally to look at creeds and collects in their devotional aspect, and as spiritual helps, without inquiring into any details of origin or authorship.

'Yes,' she said; 'I wonder I forget, for I recollect thinking I had heard of Nice before. Miss Helen and Mr. Herbert went there when he was sent to Italy for his health. It does seem strange to think of this creed being written there all those long years ago.'

'It was not written there, my good friend,' interrupted old David; 'was it, John?'

'No,' he said, 'it was drawn up in quite a different place, by a council held at Nicæa, in Bithynia.'

'Quite right, John,' replied the old man; 'that's where it was written, more than fifteen hundred years ago. I often think of that when we stand up to repeat this great confession of our Christian belief. It's been altered since then, the minister says, and put into many other languages, for it was written in Greek; but it is the same creed that was adopted then by the Fathers of the Church, who met there in the year 325 A.D. I dare say you can remember, Johnnie, why "the minister" told you young fellows one night that this creed was recited at this particular part of the service?'

'Yes,' said Johnnie; 'he said it was very fitting to repeat our creed here, when we had just been reading those Scriptures which are the foundation of our faith, and are just about to join in the most solemn act of religion.'

And then John turned the conversation into another channel, by asking if Mr. Graham had heard what a splendid offertory they had had that morning.

Mr. Graham had not. Mrs. Grainger had led him straight home, and no one had been in since.

'It was over a hundred pounds,' said John.

'Over a hundred pounds!' exclaimed the widow; 'some one must have given very handsomely.'

It was easy to guess who that some one was; for there were very few in that large congregation who could have given more than a few pence, or at the most a few shillings. Times were bad in the district of Little Burton just now, when some of the masters had brought into the place a number of foreign workmen, who were willing to work at lower wages.

Mr. Abbott had not introduced any, nor did he fear that he should have to do so. Should he be obliged to reduce the

rate of wages, his people would, for the most part, understand that nothing but necessity compelled him to take such a step, and that no one regretted it more than he did himself. Some, perhaps, might complain, and leave the mills. In this case, others would offer themselves to take thankfully the work they foolishly gave up. He knew that his wife's friend, Ruth Heathcote, had only spoken the truth when she said that many women in her own and her sister's district had told them how much rather their husbands would be working down at Abbott's for less money than in some of the other mills for more. Abbott had so many ways of making his people comfortable and happy, and money was not the only thing. Besides, he helped them so much in managing their money, that many of them had learned to make 'less' go further now than they could make 'more' go in former times. And if times were bad, well, they were bad for the master as well as for the men. He had made them understand that too—that they were all one body, and when the pinch came, all suffered together—the master perhaps, most of all, since, as the head, he had to plan and think for many, instead of only for a few.

But though the pinch just of late had been rather a sharp one, the offertory on this Midsummer Day was very large. All—or very nearly all—had given something, if only a penny, and very small sums given by a very large number soon make very big ones; a simple fact, which if only recognised and acted on by every Christian member of a Christian church, would soon make it easy to do the things for Christ's cause which we find it impossible to do now. Mr. Heathcote had told his people on the previous Sunday, speaking to them for the last time on a Sunday evening in the iron church, how much happier it would make him to think that twelve workmen were giving one penny to the offertory, than that one out of the twelve was giving a shilling, and eleven giving nothing. Very earnestly had he

spoken to them that evening of the duty of almsgiving. It had scarcely been a sermon; or, at least, such was the opinion of Charlie Preston, who had come over from his work in another county to see the new church consecrated in his old parish. There had been a text certainly—'God loveth a cheerful giver'; but the sermon had been rather an explanation or an enforcement of the sentences which were read every Sunday at the Lord's Table before the prayer for the whole state of Christ's Church militant here on earth. Charlie said it reminded him of the 'Homilies,' a book of which Mr. Graham once showed him an old copy, and which he had told him used to be read every Sunday in church, by royal authority, instead of a sermon. But Mr. Graham had not seen the resemblance. The two old Books of Homilies, which had been prepared in the reign of Edward the VI. and Queen Elizabeth, would sound very strangely in the ears of the people of Little Burton. They were only written for the people then because the clergy at that time were very different from what they are now in learning and zeal. The address on Sunday was not quite like one of the minister's usual sermons, but it was altogether unlike a homily.

'It certainly was not dull,' said Widow Grainger now, when it came once more under the discussion of three out of the four people who had discussed it then.

'No, indeed,' said the old man, 'and Charlie did not think it so.'

'Poor Charlie!' said Mrs. Grainger, in rather a melancholy tone.

'Rich Charlie, I should say rather,' replied John; 'he's getting on like a house on fire at the works. They've made him one of the overseers, though he is such a young fellow. No one had ever been known to get on so quickly.'

'He was the cleverest fellow I ever set eyes on from quite a baby,' said old David; 'and how I loved him! The

minister had not come amongst us then, and I used to fret myself often, in the way we poor faithless folk are wont to do, thinking what a pity it was that a lad with that talent and that voice (for he sang almost before he could speak) should just be left to be a burden to himself and his family —a poor helpless cripple—for want of education.'

'And now here he comes to see you—I only wish you could see him, Mr. Graham—dressed like a gentleman, and drops his sovereign into the plate.'

'A sovereign!' exclaimed Mrs. Grainger; 'did he give a sovereign?'

'Indeed he did, mother. He did not mean me to see it, though. But I did, just because he took such trouble to hide it, and was so awkward over it, that it slipped through his fingers into the plate under my very eyes.'

'He sat with you in the choir stalls, did he not? He told me he was going to ask the minister's leave to do so. He said it would be such a delight to him to sing once more in the Little Burton choir.'

'And precious glad we were to have him!' said John. 'One does not often hear a voice like his. He always sang a sight better than any other fellow amongst us, the new tenor included.'

'They say the new tenor sang beautifully,' said Mrs. Grainger. 'I don't understand much about music myself; but that part he sang alone in the anthem did sound fine.'

'Charlie Preston would have sung it a great deal better,' said Johnnie; 'for he would have put some feeling into it. There is not a scrap of expression in that fellow's singing. He does not feel what he sings, anyone can see that plainly enough.'

'Come, come, Johnnie,' said old David.

'Thank you, Mr. Graham,' he said. 'I'm afraid I need constant pulling up on the subject of that fellow. It annoys me dreadfully to see him dressed out so fine, I confess, and

then for him to be so stingy! I can't get him to put anything into my mission-box. *He* did not give a shilling, I'll warrant, to the offertory. But, there! I am forgetting myself again, and you will be reminding me that it is worse to be uncharitable than to be miserly.'

'We are none of us so good that we can afford to be hard on our neighbours,' remarked old David; 'least of all when the question is one of giving. There are not many of us who have the spirit of the widow of old, who was ready to give all she possessed to the Lord in her faith and love.'

'I am afraid I am a very different sort of widow to what she was,' said Mrs. Grainger. 'It was not right of me only to give half-a-crown on such a day as this, considering how much good I have received in that iron church, and how thankful I am for the new one. It seemed as much as I could afford, but my conscience has reproached me ever since.'

David wondered to himself when Mrs. Grainger's conscience did not reproach her.

'It *was* as much as you could afford,' he said. 'You gave it in the right spirit. It was a free-will offering for God's service—an offering, rendered unto Him, of His own.'

'Yes,' she replied; '"the silver and the gold are His."'

'All His,' continued the old man—'"the whole earth, and the fulness thereof." Of course He does not need our money for Himself; but He needs it for His poor, and for His worship, and it is our bounden duty to render to Him the best of all we have. These sentences teach us why. They show us the duty of almsgiving, and its blessing. They seem to me just to put the whole subject of almsgiving before us. What did the minister say should be our motives in giving alms?'

'Love to God,' said the widow, 'and love to man for His sake, Who has done so much for us that we can never do enough to show our gratitude to Him.'

'In letting our light so shine before men that they may be led by it to glorify, not us, but our heavenly Father. Surely there are no good works which man can do that bring more glory to God than those which lead to the promotion of the knowledge of Christ's Gospel; and there's no promoting this knowledge without money. I've often heard my old colonel say that money was the sinews of war. Well, it is not quite that in the spiritual warfare, thank God. It's not by might, nor power of any kind, that the Lord's battles are won. But, for all this, He makes money a very chief means of doing His work in His world. His churches can't be raised on this earth without money being spent on them.'

'Nor ministers maintained,' said Mrs. Grainger, who knew that there were not many who could afford to live as their own clergyman did, receiving next to nothing, and giving away a great deal.

'Nor ministers maintained,' repeated the old man. 'As it is but right that they should be. Those who benefit by the warfare must bear the cost. Those who plant the vineyard have a claim to the fruit, and those who feed the flock a right to the milk. God forbid that we should grudge that those should reap our worldly things who are sowing unto us spiritual things. Those that are taught in the Word must minister to those that teach them. It is God's own will, declared plainly enough in His Word, that they who minister about holy things should live of the sacrifice, and they who wait at the altar should partake with the altar, and they who preach the Gospel live of the Gospel.'

Mrs. Grainger had listened attentively to her old friend, but she made no answer; only she wished in her heart that she had given more than half-a-crown.

'I'm afraid, Johnnie,' she said that night to her son, as she lighted his candle — 'I'm afraid your mother is growing miserly in her old age.'

Johnnie could not refrain from smiling. His mother had so very little treasure which she could lay up for the rust and moth to corrupt, even if she desired to do so.

Mrs. Grainger saw the smile, and answered it:

'Everything is by comparison, you know, and the Lord looks at the heart. I've a terribly anxious mind; and I often feel afraid of the day of poverty coming to you, Johnnie, remembering well what a painful day it was to me. But that's not the way in which I ought to remember it. Not, I mean, by hoarding up for fear it should come back again. I've got to recollect that time to teach me to think of others who are suffering now what I suffered then, and to do to them what I was thankful enough for them to do to me. God is not mocked, Johnnie. We must not forget that a man reaps what he sows. It's true I have only a little, but I have not been diligent enough to give gladly of that little. If I were to come into a time of trouble again, I have been feeling as if I should have no claim on the blessing and the deliverance which the Lord promises to those who have helped to provide for the sick and needy.'

And she went to her humble little bedroom to thank God, Who had granted her so many comforts, and to beg Him to give her grace, while there was yet time, to do good to all—chiefly to those who were her fellow-Christians in Christ's Church, fellow-servants in the Master's household of faith; but also to others as she had opportunity. This was the will of her Father in heaven, and in this, as in all else, she must be faithful.

Meanwhile, that offertory which had brought some self-reproach to Widow Grainger's scrupulous conscience had brought a great deal of thankfulness to several other minds —especially to Mr. Heathcote's.

'Such a number of sovereigns!' had been the Bishop's remark.

'Probably fifty of them from the same hand,' the Vicar replied.

And in answer to the remark that a fifty-pound-note would have served the purpose, he added:

'Probably the sovereigns were just instead of the note, because it would have been evident where the note came from. That is the way with Mr. Abbott. Never did any man fulfil more literally the command not to let his left hand know what his right hand does. He and his wife are about as completely one as two people ever were. But my little Ruth often tells me that even Mrs. Abbott does not know half he does for the relief of the people. It's her belief that he never turns away from a tale of trouble, but is always ready to listen and see what he can do to relieve it. I had been telling my young people one day that some of the offertory sentences came from the Apocryphal Book of Tobit, who was often mentioned in old times as a model of liberality, and who divided his income into ten parts and gave three away to the poor. And Ruthie remarked that she believed Mr. Abbott was more like Zaccheus, who gave the half of his income, though there would be no need for him ever to restore fourfold to any man, for it would be impossible for him to wrong anyone. In a place like this he can't help many of his good works and much of his labour of love getting known, but he does his very best to keep them quiet. And I believe he himself never gives them another thought.'

'God will not forget them,' said the Bishop. 'He is too well pleased with such sacrifices not to bear them in remembrance, and return them in blessing.'

'And yet Mr. Abbott is very much tried,' said Mr. Heathcote.

'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth,' said the Bishop. 'But God is not unrighteous, and no love shown to His saints, or in ministering to His service, can be forgotten by

Him. Mr. Abbott is a faithful servant of His. No one can be in this place for a couple of days without seeing that plainly enough.'

'And if you remained here a couple of years, they would only serve to make that fact more plain. God has given him much, and he gives plenteously.'

'And so is gathering to himself a good reward,' replied the Bishop. 'It's lent to the Lord, and we have the Lord's word for it that what a man layeth out, it shall be paid him again. As I said before, it will all come back in blessing, probably even in this life; but if not, the store is only laid up for him, a good foundation against the time to come.'

CHAPTER VI.

HOLY COMMUNION.

YEARS passed, and seemed, as years are wont to do, more like days when looked back upon, although many of their days had been dark and dreary enough, and had seemed more like years in the living of them.

Yet, in spite of the shadows that must needs fall across every traveller's path in this life's highway—even from the moment that they first set their light footsteps in it—we find once more the young people of whom our story tells in bright and happy circumstances.

On Ruth Heathcote these shadows had fallen heavily for awhile, enveloping her bright spirit in doubt and disappointment, shutting out for many months the sunshine from her sweet face, dimming the clear light in her eyes, and drawing lines on her fair brow; and yet Ruth Heathcote was at this moment the brightest of all.

One look at her sweet face this morning, radiant as it was with the innocent happiness that filled her heart, was enough to tell that, whatever clouds there might have been in the past, they were all dispelled by the sunshine of the present.

A perfect picture she made as she moved quickly about her pretty bedroom, preparing for a sudden and not very lengthy journey, singing gaily the while, and too much engrossed in her own happy thoughts to heed the canary, who,

catching the gleefulness of the moment from her, was repeating the song she sang in louder and shriller notes. Even Robin, the little terrier who was so precious to her for the dear sake of the friend who had given him, was not attended to, but only bidden to lie down and keep quiet, as he frolicked round her, evidently eager to understand the cause of the excitement in his mistress and the stir in the room—fully resolved, also, that if she were going out at this early hour of the morning, he would go too.

'I must tell them myself,' she had said to her parents; 'it is so different to write. I should not see Helen's face, or hear her exclamation.'

'Helen is not much given to exclamations,' her father had answered; 'she has more control over her feelings than her impetuous little sister.'

'Not so very little, father,' she replied, drawing herself up, and feeling as if she had grown two inches taller during the last two days; 'and she will exclaim now, I know. I believe this will be a great surprise to her, and how pleased she will be I know very well; and Harold will make some of his wise speeches. I long to see them both and hear what they will say. And Hannah's going to Manchester makes it so easy for me to go to them, as I so much want you to let me do. I hate writing.'

'And love talking,' said her father, as, putting her arms round his neck, she prevented by her kisses the affirmative answer which she could read in his eyes, and ran away to prepare for a sudden visit to the home of her married sister.

'The child is wonderfully happy,' was Mr. Heathcote's remark, as he closed the door which Ruth had left wide open, and returned to his wife. 'We should not have been so anxious about her three years ago if we had foreseen this. Another proof added to the many I have had before, that God is more to be trusted than we think. No need to

dread now lest the troubles of her life should affect her health, and bring fresh sorrow to our hearts.'

'No, indeed,' said Mrs. Heathcote; 'I have never seen anyone happier. But then, of course, it is Ruth's way to show all she feels. She is so unlike Helen: the more *she* feels, the less she says. I never remember hearing her give utterance to one ecstatic expression.'

'No,' said Mr. Heathcote; 'I was thinking only last night that I have not heard Helen say as much about Harold Moorhouse, or her admiration of him, and affection for him, during all the years of her married life, as I have heard Ruthie say about Leonard Prescott during the one day of her engagement to him.'

'And yet Helen is perfectly happy,' said Mrs. Heathcote; 'one could not wish to see a more devoted wife and mother.'

Never were truer words. Anyone who had looked in that morning at Amersham Vicarage would have needed no further confirmation of them than the expression on the face of the young mistress of that happy, well-ordered household.

A very pleasant picture she made also, though of a totally different type from that which her younger sister had presented, as she flitted quickly about her room, singing so gaily to herself.

Helen Moorhouse never did anything quickly. Quiet was the very essence of her nature—quiet in her work, in her joys, in her sorrows. But, looking at her now, as she sat quietly at her sewing in her pleasant morning-room, keeping her foot meanwhile on the little cradle at her feet, the repose of her countenance was that of the most perfect thankful content.

A pleasant room it was indeed. Those who had known it ten years ago, when it was the so-called drawing-room of the scholarly bachelor master of the house, had some diffi-

culty in recognising it as the same room now. And yet not only was it the same, but not a single piece of furniture had been removed. Mrs. Heathcote, who had gone over at Harold Moorhouse's entreaty to arrange the house fittingly to receive a lady, had suggested that the heavy bookshelf running along one side of the room should be removed, and a smaller one made to take its place. But Helen insisted on its remaining. 'There was no room for any more books in the study, and what would Harold do with these? Besides, he knew where to find every one of them. To disarrange things would be to give him great inconvenience, and surely he was bringing a wife into his home to add to his comfort, not take from it.' So the bookshelf remained, but all along the top stood statuettes and pretty ornaments of various kinds. And so with the large round table which Ruth declared must go! It was hundreds of years old—a fact which would have given it virtue in Helen's eyes, even if it had not been, as she knew, a favourite piece of furniture with Harold's mother. All the change she would allow was that it should be moved to the corner of the room, where it remained, its heavy carvings only setting off to greater advantage the pretty vases of flowers, which were daily arranged by Helen's hand, the work-baskets, and other articles of feminine use that adorned it.

A prettier room could not well be seen, nor a sweeter-looking occupant than Helen herself, as she sat now in it watching the morning sleep of her infant daughter.

Suddenly her quiet was disturbed by the opening of the door, so quickly that her eyes turned at once to the cradle to see if an end had not been put to the nap which it was so necessary for her own peace should not be unduly interrupted.

Then turning to the little intruder, a dark-eyed, olive-complexioned, handsome boy, she would have reproved

him for running such a risk of waking his baby sister, had not his eager inquiry demanded an instant reply, which she knew was the only thing to which at that moment he would have listened.

'What is militant, mother?' he asked—somewhat imperiously, it must be allowed.

Helen Moorhouse was perfectly aware of the tendency to imperiousness in her firstborn's character, but she was also aware that it was not advisable to be constantly checking it. It was the root she desired to see eradicated, not the fruits which it was already bearing in an unusual decision of manner and impatience of control. Moreover, it made her the more patient to know from whom her boy had inherited these characteristics, and that they were not derived from his calm, self-forgetting, humble-minded, although so scholarly father.

'Militant, Harry?' she replied; 'militant means fighting. Why do you want to know?'

'Because it's in my lesson, mother. I told you yesterday I'd got into three syllables. Father left me some words to learn and find out the meaning, and I understand them all except this one. So I came to ask you. Militant,' he repeated, 'means fighting.'

And then a bright look passed over his face—the look of extreme intelligence which often made his mother check, almost with a prayer, the thought that rose in her mind at sight of it, that one day her clever boy would live to be somebody, or do something.

'I know, mother,' he said; 'I understand. That's why we call the soldiers the "military," is not it?'

'And I know something else, Harold!'

'What's that, mother? something about militant?'

'Yes, Harold, something about militant. I know a little boy who hears his father ask the people in his church every Sunday to pray for Christ's Church Militant here on earth,

and yet he did not remember that he had ever heard the word before; and when he did hear it, he did not know what it meant.'

Another intelligent look on the rosy face, and another rapid exclamation.

'I remember now, mother! it's that long prayer just before we come out of church. But I never listen to that; I'm always so tired before it comes. But,' he added, quite interested now, however little attention he might have paid to the subject before, 'how can the Church be militant —and fight?'

'Oh, Harold!' said his mother.

But before she had time to ask how a little boy who had been taught so often what his baptism had made him could make such an inquiry, he exclaimed:

'I know, mother, it means fighting under Christ's banner.'

'Against sin, the world, and the devil, Harold, so as to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant all one's life long. That is what it is to be "militant" in Christ's Church on earth. You are always saying how much you would like to be a soldier, Harry. That is the kind of soldier mother wants you to be.'

'But I want to be the other kind of soldier too, mother, and to wear a real sword, and go into battle and fight for the Queen against the enemy, and win great victories. Nurse says it's because you're afraid of my getting killed that you always try to put fighting out of my head. But mothers should not mind their boys being killed—at least, not in battle. Besides, you know everybody does not get killed. There's old Mr. Graham that grandpapa takes me to see. He's past ninety, and he went through lots and lots of battles, and never got killed, though I am sure he always went to the front whenever he could, as I mean to do,

because he must have been a *very* brave man. I do like when he tells me stories about fighting.'

'And I like when my son learns his lessons perfectly, to say to father when he comes in, Harold.'

'I know them now, mother, every one. And there's father coming into the study by the garden-door. I can say them every word.'

And Helen, thankful that baby Winifred had not awoke, was left once more to her sewing and her meditations. Her boy's entrance had given a turn to the current of her thoughts, and had set her thinking of that prayer for the Church Militant, which was somewhat of a weariness to him, but had often been such a great delight to her in its threefold aspect of an oblation to Almighty God, a full intercession for others, and a thankful commemoration of the faithful departed. An earnest longing arose in her heart, as often before, that the day might come when her darling boy, the very joy and pride of her life, would have his thoughts less fixed on the fighting of earth's battles and the winning of earth's glory, than on the conquest of sin and self, and the maintenance of true religion and virtue. If it were God's will that he should be an earthly soldier, as he so constantly expressed his desire to be, then she trusted that God would give her grace to submit to that will. It was a noble profession. The double warfare could be carried on without any hindrance one to the other. On the contrary, she had not been intimately acquainted during all these years with old David Graham without learning from him how much true service for an earthly King teaches how the heavenly King can best be served. None, she knew, could ever fight so wisely or so bravely as those who were endued with wisdom and courage from on high, and who realized that the life which they held in their hand every time they went into action was but a thing of nought compared with the heavenly life which awaited them should they never come out of battle.

If Harold's life-work was to be that of a soldier, chosen of God for him, then his mother must not seek to keep him from it, though it was not the profession which she herself would have chosen for her boy, whose early proficiency in book-learning had led her to expect that his career would be like that of his father, one of great literary success. All things were in God's hands, and there she was content to leave them. So long as her boy became a useful, living member of the Universal Church, confessing Christ's Holy Name in the truth of His Holy Word, and serving Him in the spirit of unity and godly love, the manner of that service must be left to Him Who alone knows for what work each servant is specially qualified. If Harold's heart, as a man, should be as set on being a soldier as it was now, she would not withhold him from wearing the uniform of the Queen whom she prayed daily to God to save and defend, that under her all might be godly and quietly governed. In this way, as well as in any other, he, too, might further faithfully his Master's cause on earth, in truly and indifferently, without partiality or respect of persons, helping to administer justice, to punish wickedness and vice, and maintain true religion and virtue. Her secret desire, however, was to see him following in the steps of his father, and giving his life to the direct ministry of Christ's Church, rightly and duly administering His Holy Sacraments as well as setting forth His true and living Word by his life and doctrine.

But the desires of our own hearts for ourselves are often not the purposes of God's will for us. Helen had learned this truth most entirely, and so all she ever now dared to ask her God, with the full certainty that her request was according to His will, and therefore could not, in His own good time, fail of fulfilment, was that her precious eldest son might with meek heart and due reverence hear and receive God's Holy Word, and truly serve Him in holiness and righteousness all the days of his life. This prayer granted, she could leave the

rest to God. Had she not proofs constantly before her own eyes that in every vocation of life, through the whole wide state of Christ's Church Militant here on earth, it was possible for all men to serve and honour Him? Her father, her husband, the Bishop, so long one of the objects of her and Ruth's 'hero-worship,' were not doing more in their holy vocation to help in the comfort and succour of all who in this passing life were in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity, than was old David Graham in his life of blindness and weakness, but of constant prayer and intercession.

When the day should have come for all these faithful servants to have departed this life in Christ's faith and fear, she should be able to bless God's Holy Name for one as well as for the other. All, in different ways, were leaving good examples for those to follow who should come after, in order that with them they might one day be partakers of the Father's heavenly Kingdom, through Jesus Christ, the only Mediator and Advocate.

CHAPTER VII.

HOLY COMMUNION.

HELEN'S meditations had just been interrupted by her baby daughter's opening her eyes, which were large and blue and as like her father's as her brother Harold's were dark and eager, and like his mother's, and by her stretching up a pair of little white arms with a pleading gesture to be taken out of her pretty pink-trimmed bassinette, when the door was again suddenly opened, and a yet more decided interruption to thought and needlework was made by the entrance of 'Auntie Ruth.'

One glance at her beaming face was sufficient to assure Helen that whatever might be the cause of this most unexpected visit, it was not an unhappy one.

Scarcely returning her sister's greeting, albeit she loved her so well, and without making any reply to the inquiry as to 'what in the world brought her over from Little Burton so unexpectedly?' she threw off her hat in the rapid way characteristic of all her movements, and catching up her baby niece in her arms, smothered her with kisses, which little Winifred returned by a cry of displeasure and a fresh stretching out of the tiny fat arms to her mother.

Helen saw that her sister was not only the bearer of unexpected news, but that it was of a nature which she was somewhat nervous of communicating.

'You are wonderfully excited, Ruth,' she said. 'Have you come over in person to tell us of your engagement?'

'Yes, I have,' she answered. 'Don't you think it was much too valuable news to be entrusted to the post? Your silly little sister is engaged to be married.'

'To Mr. Prescott?' said Helen, with just a shade of anxiety in the tone of her inquiry.

'To Mr. Prescott, Helen.'

'Oh, Ruth! I *am* glad!'

'So am I, Helen.'

'Harold will be so glad, Ruth—so thankful!'

And Harold appearing at that moment—brought out of his study, indeed, by the sudden excitement that seemed to be going on in the drawing-room, and in which he thought he recognised Ruth's voice—his wife communicated the news to him.

'I am most thankful,' he said; 'thankful for both your sakes. You are a highly favoured little woman, Ruth.'

'Thank you for the information,' she said. 'You have always been most kind in imparting instruction to your ignorant little sister.'

'There are few men like Prescott,' he continued.

'Very few indeed, Harold; perhaps not any. I told father you would be sure to make all sorts of wise speeches.'

'I don't know about wise speeches,' he said, smiling. 'I only say what everyone who knows Prescott must say. I think, Ruth, you ought to thank God with all your heart to have won the love of such a man as he is—one so exactly suited to you, and to whom you are so well suited.'

'He being so good and clever, and grave and learned, and I being such a foolish little excitable ignoramus,' replied Ruth.

'That is your own conclusion, not mine, Ruthie.'

'But it is something of what you meant to say, Harold, and I believe you are pretty correct. I think a man like Mr. Prescott is just as well with a wife like me. I can't understand all the things he is for ever busy about, but I

can make his home snug and cosy for him ; and he says he will only be too glad to turn the key of his office on those great big books and those huge portfolios of drawings, and come back to his own house for rest and recreation.' Then, checking her eager, because somewhat nervous, talking, she said more quietly : 'But I don't mean that you have not rest and recreation in *your* home, Harold. I am sure one has only to come into your house for an hour to see what a snug nest it is, and how comfortable Helen makes everything in it, though she is so fond of reading and study, and enters into all your literary pursuits.'

'And helps me in them, Ruthie. There is no rule in things of this kind. Some men like to shake off their work from their mind the moment they have done with it, and need an entire rest from it. Prescott is one of them. We used to laugh at him at college because he never would talk "shop," as we called it, even in our walks. Others are different, and need sympathy in everything they do, even to the writing of a letter—like myself,' he added, with a loving glance at the wife who at that time was enabling him to carry on a work of some literary importance which he could not have found leisure to pursue had it not been for the help she rendered him in it.

And then, giving his little Harold a holiday for the rest of the day in honour of Aunt Ruth's unexpected arrival, he and Helen and Ruthie had a very long chat together, as happy as it was long.

The one important subject discussed, they talked together of hundreds of things, all those little details of home interest which somehow rarely find their way into correspondence, some because they seem of too trifling importance to be committed to paper, others because they are of too private a character, but which make one day of familiar talk worth more than a year of letter-writing.

And Ruth could only remain one day. Helen could not

press her to stay even until to-morrow, when she told her who was coming all the way down from London to spend that one evening at Little Burton.

So the two sisters made the most of their time together, chatting, as perhaps only sisters can, of things past, present and future.

Yet it was not until they were on their way to the station, whither Helen accompanied her sister, Mr. Moorhouse having an engagement, that Ruth told her what she knew would give her almost more pleasure than anything she had heard that day.

'Herbert was at the Holy Communion yesterday, Helen,' she said quite suddenly, with a quick flush spreading itself over her face, which struck Helen as strange even in the midst of her delight at the unexpected announcement.

It was one of Helen's regrets, as regarded her sister, that she could not—or she imagined that she could not—arouse within her the same anxiety that she herself felt for Herbert, their only brother.

'Indeed,' she said. 'I am very much surprised.'

'So was I, Helen, when I saw him preparing to come with us to the early celebration. He had not said a word about it beforehand to anyone.'

'And he told me that he did not intend to go any more —at all events, until he could see his way more clearly. I wonder what made him change his mind.'

'I can tell you,' said Ruth.

'*You*, Ruth?'

And just a touch of a very old and long chased-away jealous feeling stole once more over Helen's mind at the thought of Herbert, her 'own boy,' having confided to Ruth any feelings which had been withheld from her, the guardian sister who had watched over him from his infancy almost with a mother's love.

It was by an effort that she forced herself to say :

'He told you?'

'No,' said Ruth; 'but Mr. Prescott told me.'

'Mr. Prescott!' exclaimed Helen. 'What could he know about it?'

'Everything, Helen, considering that he has been the means of making Herbert, as you say, change his mind on the subject. It seems that he has had it very much on his mind to do so ever since Herbert has been in London, and at last he has succeeded.'

Helen looked at her watch.

'I am glad we are so early. Let us walk on quickly, and then you will have time to tell me quietly about it before the train comes in.'

'Mr. Prescott wished me to,' said Ruth. 'Herbert asked him to tell you, but he said he could scarcely do so in a letter; he has so little time for letter-writing, except on business.'

'And what little time he has he prefers to give to someone else,' said Helen, smiling; 'and Herbert himself is such a poor hand at writing.'

'Very,' said Ruth. 'That was why he wished Mr. Prescott to write for him, since he would not see you himself for such a long time.'

And then, as they sat down quietly in a corner of the waiting-room, she gave her sister a few details of the manner in which her future husband had obtained such an influence over the heart of his future brother-in-law as to succeed in clearing away the mists of doubt, and overcoming the imaginary mountains of difficulty which had so long prevented him from becoming what Helen so earnestly desired to see him—a regular communicant.

Concerning the past stage of Herbert Heathcote's experience, Helen needed no telling. Ruth knew very little, but Helen knew a great deal of the morbid sensitiveness which had made her brother during all this long time—although so

frequently and lovingly called and bidden by God Himself—refuse to come to the rich feast provided for his spiritual food and sustenance. All his father's instructions, all his sister's persuasions, had failed to convince him that he could be amongst those who might draw near religiously and devoutly. He dared not approach the holy table, in the dread which he felt lest—instead of being a meet partaker of the holy mystery, and receiving that great benefit promised to all who, with a penitent heart and lively faith, spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink His blood—he should only kindle God's wrath against himself by receiving this Holy Sacrament unworthily.

Many and many a conversation had Helen held with him on this solemn subject. Many and many a prayer had she offered to God that He would Himself show her brother that since his faith in God was true, and his sorrow for sin very real, and his desire to amend his life very earnest, and his charity with all men unfeigned, the invitation to come to the feast was addressed personally to him, and his refusal was not only a wilful rejection of offered blessings, but a sin against God's grace.

And now the prayer was heard, and the blessing given, although not by the means to which she had trusted. Helen had so often entreated her brother to open his mind as freely to his father as he had done to her. Mr. Heathcote himself had often sought to draw out his boy's feelings on the subject more fully. After her marriage, she had earnestly striven to bring Herbert to discuss the subject with her husband, and Mr. Moorhouse himself had done his best to lead him to do so.

'It seems so strange,' she said to Ruth.

'I don't quite know that,' Ruth answered. 'I have sometimes felt myself, Helen—and I am sure I love father with all my heart—but I have sometimes felt, especially since I have been grown up, as if it were more difficult to be un-

reserved about religious things with one's very own nearest relations.'

'I don't think it ought to be,' said Helen.

'Perhaps it ought not, Helen, but I think it is. And certainly it has been so with Herbert. If you had only seen how devout he was yesterday, and how happy, too, he looked, your very heart would have been full of thankfulness. Mine was, and I am sure so was father's. I believe it was one of the happiest moments of his life when he saw Herbert, without a single word, calmly and quietly take his Prayer-book and come with us to the Holy Communion.'

CHAPTER VIII.

HOLY COMMUNION.

It certainly had been a happy day to Mr. Heathcote, as well as to Herbert. Never had any participation in the Holy Communion seemed so 'comfortable' to his own soul, or brought him more rest of heart and peace of mind. Never had he been more thankful for any answer given to prayer than when he saw his only son kneeling at the sacred table to receive from his hands the consecrated elements appointed by our Lord as the outward signs in that Holy Sacrament, which He has Himself instituted for our souls' welfare.

For long had it weighed upon Mr. Heathcote's mind, quite as much as, or even more than, it had weighed on Helen's, to hear his boy making empty excuses, although not feigned, for separating himself from his brethren in Christ when they assembled themselves to partake of the banquet of Christ's most heavenly food. Herbert would never be amongst the willing 'dissemblers,' the hypocrites who, pretending to be what they are not, draw on themselves God's severest judgments by eating and drinking with a lie on their lips. Many such had Mr. Heathcote warned away from the Holy Communion Sacrament, lest on them should fall, in God's justice, as heavy judgments as St. Paul tells us had, in early Christian days, fallen upon the Corinthians in punishment for the same sin.

Had his boy been a blasphemer of God ; had he been in the habit of using such language as, alas ! was to be heard only too frequently amongst the youths of Little Burton, where one rarely passed through a street without hearing one or another take God's Holy Name in vain ; or had he by any manner of evil living, by immorality of any kind, by malice or envy, or other such grievous crime, been, as many are (some, indeed, almost unconsciously), a hinderer or slanderer of God's Word, his father would indeed have used every effort to lead him to repentance, but would never have permitted him to bring upon himself God's judgments by coming to the Holy Table. But it was quite the reverse with Herbert Heathcote. From a child he had possessed a tender conscience. Even as a little boy, if he imagined that he had injured his sisters or his companions in any way, his one desire was to make restitution and satisfaction, giving back anything which he even fancied he had not obtained quite lawfully, seeking to make amends for every little offence he might have even inadvertently committed. In every nursery quarrel Herbert was always the first to seek reconciliation, and if anyone had offended him he never needed that they should come half-way to meet him in 'making up,' for he was ready to go the whole way to be at peace once more. And as an elder boy at school, and still more during his life in London, his dread of falling into temptation, his earnest desire to regulate his whole 'conversation'—by which he understood not only the words he uttered, but every action of his life—by the 'rule of God's commandments,' had been very remarkable ; so remarkable, indeed, that they had been the means of first awaking Mr. Prescott's especial interest in the new pupil who had become articled to him.

The so-called chances of life had brought as important changes at Little Burton Vicarage as the course of years is wont to bring to every family.

When the new church was to be built at Little Burton, Mr. Heathcote, who was to be its Vicar, and Mr. Abbott, the manufacturer, whose wealth was to be the chief means of building it, equally desired that it should be as beautiful as possible.

But Mr. Heathcote knew very little, and Mr. Abbott knew absolutely nothing, of church architecture. So the former was asked by the latter to find some one who did, and he at once wrote to an old college friend, whose life had been devoted to art—and especially to church art—asking him to come to Little Burton and give his advice on the important subject.

In reply, he received a few lines from his old friend saying that he was not in a state of health to be able to accede to this request, but that, if Mr. Heathcote wished, his son would come in his place, and would not only give him better advice on the subject than he himself could do, but would be able to introduce him to a friend, an architect of the highest ability, to whom, had he such a work in prospect, he would rather entrust its execution than to anyone with whom he was at that moment personally acquainted.

So Harold Moorhouse—the eldest son of Mr. Heathcote's oldest friend—came to stay at Little Burton, and shortly after came Edward Prescott, the rising young architect of whom his father had made mention, neither of them imagining that their coming would lead to any other consequence than the building of the church of St. Simon and St. Jude, in the district of Little Burton.

Edward Prescott had his hands full of business at this moment, and could only remain for two days, which were very fully occupied in discussing plans and going into the matter of expenses. They were chiefly spent in Mr. Heathcote's study, and he saw but little of the Vicar's wife or family. He came away with no other impression concern-

ing them than that one of the daughters was very pretty, and the other played and sang beautifully.

But Harold Moorhouse had more time at his disposal. He had lately left a curacy, in which he had been working very zealously, and was soon to be inducted into a college living. It was of small emolument, but, to him, of special attractiveness, since it would afford him, by its retired situation and small population, opportunity to carry on those literary pursuits and interests which, although they had been as life itself to him during his college career, he had altogether dropped since he had become a curate in a populous town. There he had been working for some years amongst the poorest and lowest class of the people, as energetically as though bread-tickets and coal-tickets, and subscriptions to the shoe club and blanket club, and investments in the penny bank, were fully as interesting to him as the Greek and Latin books on his shelves, once his daily and most delightful companions, but now becoming dusty from disuse. He had been hard-worked, and when his father's old friend and his own godfather, whom he had not seen for years, begged him to lengthen his visit to Little Burton, he gladly consented.

That fortnight's visit had led to the great happiness of his own and Helen Heathcote's life, though neither he nor she imagined at that time, or for a very long time afterwards, that such would be the case.

But before Harold Moorhouse left the happy little family in Manchester Street a fast friendship had been established between himself and every member of it, most especially with Helen, but including even the shy, reserved Herbert.

Indeed, the notice which Harold took of her quiet, gentle, but not very talented young brother had greatly helped to establish the exalted opinion of him, the foundation of which had been laid by all she had ever heard of him from her childhood. Talent was, or perhaps it would be more

correct to say talent had been, the chief object of Helen's worship. Learning had been from quite a child her favourite occupation. Had she only been born to be a boy instead of a girl, her ambition would have been to win every prize that could be gained at school, and then go to college and win all possible honours there, and afterwards devote a lifetime to literary pursuits. As such a life was denied to herself, the next best thing would be to see it fulfilled by her only brother. But these hopes were very early crushed in the bud. Herbert was slower of learning than either she or Ruth had been. At first Helen fondly believed that this slowness of development was but a proof of latent genius, as in the case of so many great men of whom she had read, who had seemed dull in their childhood only to astonish the world the more by their future brilliancy. But the older Herbert grew the more certain did it become that in whatever career he might be destined to distinguish himself, it was not to be that of learning, or literary reputation. So slow, indeed, was he at all his studies, that Helen at length—albeit the most patient and persevering of teachers—was almost ready to give up every hope in despair, when a talent was suddenly discovered which no one ever imagined he possessed. And it was discovered by Harold Moorhouse.

Mr. Heathcote came of a very musical family, and was highly musical himself. So was his wife, and their desire had been to cultivate this accomplishment to the greatest possible extent in their daughters. This desire, as we know, had been gratified as regarded Helen beyond their fondest expectations, and Ruth also played and sang well. But neither of the girls had much talent for drawing, and their parents had not sought to cultivate it. The children's mother, indeed, had been a very fair artist, but she was also an excellent musician, and during the few years of her married life she had entirely dropped the pursuit of the art

for which her husband cared but little, to devote as much time as possible to the art in which he delighted. The only one of the family who had ever cared to take up a pencil was Herbert, and the scribblings (chiefly on the backs of exercise-books, or on the blank pages of Latin grammars and histories) in which he had been wont to indulge had never been anything but a source of reproof to him, both from his masters at school and the devoted assistant of his studies at home. But on a certain day, during that visit of Harold Moorhouse to Little Burton, a change of feeling took place with regard to 'Herbert's scribblings.'

Education was Harold Moorhouse's hobby. But in all his experience of young people and their studies, he had never before taken such delight as he did in the young Heathcotes and their pursuits. Mr. Heathcote used to say laughingly that if anyone wanted Harold they would be sure to find him in the schoolroom.

And from that schoolroom he came one day with a piece of paper in his hand, which he brought into the Vicar's study, telling him that he had been surprised at finding Herbert busy over it.

'Instead of working out his sums in that simple method in which you took such pains to instruct him last night,' said Mr. Heathcote. 'My dear fellow, you would not be so surprised if you knew the boy a little better. The master of his form at school told me once that he would have some hope of his getting on in his work if only he would give up his trick of scribbling. One can't keep a pencil out of his hands.'

'I should take good care to keep one in them if he were my boy,' said Harold, 'especially as you seem to think he has so little talent for anything else.'

'And as little, I should think, for drawing,' said his father. 'It has never struck me that there was any talent in any productions of his pencil that I have ever seen.'

'Perhaps not of one kind of talent, but there certainly is of another,' replied Mr. Moorhouse.

And he called the Vicar's attention to the singular accuracy with which the boy had drawn the outlines of the proposed new church, the plans for which he had only seen lying on his father's study-table.

'I am not a bad hand myself at that kind of drawing,' he said, 'but I really thought he must have had the help of a ruler. It seems, however, he had not. He must have singular correctness of eye and steadiness of hand; and it is remarkable that he could have carried away such an accurate idea of the whole thing as to have made that sketch without any model to copy from.'

'The young monkey!' said Mr. Heathcote; 'no doubt he was getting that plan into his head all the time that he was bungling over his Latin yesterday morning.'

'That reminds me of Edward Prescott's early experiences. He has often told me that he used to be wondering how in the world the ceiling of their hall at school was fitted together, when he was suddenly recalled to the knowledge of what he was about by having to hold out his hand to receive punishment for some exceptionally stupid mistake in answering,' replied Harold.

'But Edward Prescott did remarkably well at school, I thought you said.'

'After it was found out in what direction his abilities lay, and he was allowed to follow it. He has often told me that he hated even mathematics—the study in which he did so well afterwards—until he discovered that a knowledge of that science would greatly help him to become a good architect. Then he set to work in earnest, and, as you know, he took honours at Cambridge.'

'I am afraid Herbert will never take any honours in anything,' said Mr. Heathcote. And then he added thoughtfully: 'But he certainly has a love of drawing, whether he

has a talent for it or not. I wonder if he would like to be an architect.'

This half-hour's conversation had led not only to Herbert Heathcote's being allowed to cultivate his drawing capabilities to the utmost, but also to his being articled as a pupil to Mr. Edward Prescott, for whom he had formed from the first the most ardent boyish affection. Other people had repressed and reproved him. Even Helen, patient and persevering as she was, had often been harsh—her very anxiety for his progress in his studies sometimes making her severe. Mr. Prescott sympathized with him and encouraged him; and in return the boy gave him more reverence and regard than he had ever been known to show to anyone. And this affection it was that had given his sister Ruth's future husband such influence over him that by its means he had been brought to become what for months his elder sister had longed to see him, a regular communicant.

CHAPTER IX.

HOLY COMMUNION.

In one of the prettiest and best ordered, albeit one of the smallest houses in the only pleasant suburb of Little Burton, an unusual excitement prevailed. The neighbours opposite wondered why, on this bright morning, the blinds of Mrs. Job Taylor's house should all be drawn up, instead of being, as usual, carefully closed until the sun had gone well round the corner and there was no longer any fear of its fading the pink lining of the pretty curtains, or injuring the polish of the well-kept furniture. They were still more surprised when, before ten o'clock, at which hour, if Mrs. Taylor was to be seen at all, she was to be seen passing swiftly from one room to another, in a large white apron, evidently intent on superintending some portion of household work, that good lady appeared at the window of the best parlour, dressed in her Sunday gown and smartest cap.

'What could be going on,' remarked one to another, a question which remained unanswered, until a railway cab drove up to the door, and, at the same moment, Mrs. Taylor disappeared from the window.

Several inquisitive pairs of eyes were eagerly fixed on that cab, whilst several curious individuals wondered who the handsome young man could possibly be who, alighting from it, sprang rapidly up the snow-white steps and entered the

front door without knocking at it. But no one saw the meeting with the anxiously waiting watcher within.

Mrs. Taylor dared not come to the door to meet her boy Dick. There might be people looking on, and for once in her life she could not trust her own powers of self-command.

For years this one moment had lived in her mind as the point on which all her hopes were centred. For years her son had been absent from his native place, recovering in America the character which he had lost by early dishonesty in Mr. Abbott's office in Little Burton. If he should return, his mother would be happy once more. Until then she would work and wait, and get everything as she would like him, her handsome clever boy, to see it when he came back.

Now that she held him in her arms, absolutely speechless with happiness—for though the one word 'Richard' rose to her lips, she could not utter it—she felt that her fondest hopes were realized. He was handsomer even than she had expected he would be. Several thoughts connected with this rose in her mind within the first quarter of an hour after his return. She thought of the impression he would make on the Little Burton folk when they saw him in church next day; of how certain he would be of winning his cousin Minnie's affection should he still desire to do so. But the first moments were so entirely engrossed with the one supreme bliss of having her boy once more with her, that she, who never forgot anything, forgot that the cab was standing at the door, until Richard, disengaging himself from her long, tight grasp, said:

'I must get my luggage brought in, mother, and pay my fare;' adding, 'How well you look, to be sure—not a day older.' And then he inquired, 'But where's Minnie?' And the cab being despatched, and the servant sent to carry 'Mr. Richard's luggage to his room,' he repeated the

question, adding, 'She has not left, has she—not gone to make room for me, I hope? I could have been put up anywhere, rather than that.'

'You need not be afraid,' replied his mother, well pleased to see that, although her own feelings had undergone an entire change as regarded Minnie, those of her son remained the same. 'You need not be afraid. She'll be here directly. She's only at church.'

'At church!' he exclaimed. 'Why at church? it is not Sunday.'

'No. But it is a Saint's Day. I can't often go in the morning, there's so much to do looking after the house; but Minnie always goes, and she was to remain for the Holy Communion. I was glad it happened so, Dick. I wanted to be alone here when you arrived,' which remark, natural as it was, met with no response from Dick.

The uppermost thought in *his* mind as the cab rattled through Little Burton, turning first down one street and then another, had been of the small, well-shaped head with its mass of black hair, and the sweet pale face and dark thoughtful eyes that he had hoped to see at the window of No. 4 when he should at last reach Sunnyside Hill.

He was impatient, until at length a tall slight figure appeared coming towards the house.

'That's not Minnie,' he exclaimed; and then, adding, almost in the same breath, 'I declare it is,' he was by her side before his mother had time to speak.

They came in together. A handsome pair, Mrs. Taylor said to herself. She did not believe there was such another in all Little Burton—and like each other, too. People said that this was a sign of happiness in marriage. One hope had been fulfilled to Mrs. Taylor: her son had returned well in health, prosperous in circumstances, a handsome, steady young man. Another hope took its place in her mind. To marry his cousin, Minnie Davis, Mrs. Taylor knew had

been her son's desire almost from a youth. The day had been when, jealous of Minnie from past associations, she had scoffed at this desire, and sought, with all the energy of her strong character, to crush it out of her boy's heart. Now with equally strong purpose did she long to see it realized. There never had been such a boy as her Richard, either for beauty or cleverness. He had been led astray in years gone by, and yielded to dishonesty, it was true, but even then he had been more sinned against than sinning, and he had come round all right, and turned out well. For the last few years he had been as fully the one great source of his mother's hopes and happiness as when the beauty of his personal appearance, the loveliness of his voice, and his proficiency in his studies, had been the food on which her heart had lived, and which had kept it well satisfied, when otherwise it would have been starved to death in the famine of disappointment which the marriage with Job Taylor, for which her soul had so earnestly craved, had brought to her.

For some time after her husband and son had left her she had been kept in the cruellest ignorance concerning her boy. He was with his father, and his father would not allow him to write. But not very long ago a letter had come telling her that Job Taylor had left his son as suddenly as he had left his wife. Things had gone badly with Job Taylor in America, and he found his boy a burden. So one morning he had said to him, with his usual coolness, 'I am going away, Dick, and you will have to look out for yourself. I have got to earn my living, and you must earn yours.' This Dick had succeeded in doing in the very house where his father had been working, his employers finding something to like in the boy, though for some time they had been mistrusting the father, and keeping a quiet watch over him. After this, Richard had written home regularly to his mother, without, however, mentioning Minnie Davis's name. He heard quite enough of her,

without making inquiries, to know that, so far as his mother was concerned, no obstacle would be put in the way of his carrying out his desires if he should find his cousin on his return what she was when he left her. And until he had ascertained whether this was the case or not, he had no intention of compromising himself by allowing any feeling of his own to transpire.

True it was, as Mrs. Taylor often said, that there were very few girls like Minnie Davis. Certainly there was not one other such in Little Burton, setting aside all thought of her nice little fortune, and also of her prettiness; for Mrs. Taylor's good opinion of individuals was established on better things than money or beauty. She did not know any girl whom she thought more fit to occupy such a happy position as that of Richard's wife. Amiable and affectionate in character, and very energetic, if at times a little hasty and self-willed, a good housekeeper, wise and prudent beyond her years, clever and bright and well educated, people had often remarked to her what a 'splendid wife her handsome niece would make.' At such times the words 'for Richard' had always stolen secretly into her mind.

'She ought to marry a husband worthy of her,' had been said to her more than once; and, to Mrs. Job Taylor's mind, there could be no one more worthy than her son Richard.

But until now all such thoughts had met with an immediate check. Mrs. Taylor's chief characteristic was common-sense. She was not a woman to build castles in the air. Any day might bring her the news of Richard's engagement or marriage to some American girl, and then where would have been the use of all the pleasant plans she had made for him and herself and Minnie when they should be settled together once more, a happy family party, at Little Burton?

But now, when she saw that Richard's heart was fully bent on marrying Minnie, she set herself at once to the furtherance of his wishes, and never dreamed of their being disappointed. To her, Richard was perfection, and when she dwelt on his various gifts of person and mind, Minnie made no attempt to contradict her.

But when, on the following Sunday, Minnie came into the Vicarage—there was a Vicarage now at Little Burton—and sat down on what she called her 'own little chair' for the usual talk with her dear Miss Ruthie after the Bible-class, the case was different.

It would have been a very bitter pill for Mrs. Taylor to swallow, could she have been present in that little room and heard the words which her niece was uttering.

'I am to tell you what I think of my cousin Dick, am I?' she said, looking up at Ruth with the half-serious, half-playful look which Ruth always called 'Minnie's most bewitching expression.' 'Well, he is very handsome, dear Miss Ruthie, and the people here say he "has charming manners." And he is certainly very gifted. It would delight Miss Helen—Mrs. Moorhouse, I should say—to hear him play the violin, and his voice is even more beautiful now he is a man than when he was a boy. And he reads beautifully. I never heard anyone read so well except Mr. Prescott. And he is very amiable and good-natured. I feel as if I ought to like him very much. But somehow or other I can't. He makes me think of those lines you and Miss Helen used to say:

> '"I do not love thee, Doctor Fell,
> The reason why I cannot tell.
> But this alone I know full well,
> I do not love thee, Dr. Fell."'

'Which it is to be hoped, Minnie, your aunt does not perceive,' said Ruth.

'No, Miss Ruthie, I am glad to say she does not; and I

don't mean her to, either. She is so devoted to him, so immensely proud of him. It would grieve her dreadfully, I believe, to know that *any*body did not think him as perfect as she does herself. And I am so thankful that she should have this happiness, for she is kinder to me than before. One might think that now that Dick has come back she would not have thought so much about me. But it is not a bit the case. She likes me to join in all they do quite as much as when we were alone together. You would say that I was more of a spoiled child than ever.'

Such was Minnie Davis's first account of her cousin Richard.

Her second came a few weeks later, in answer to another inquiry from the same friend. Ruth was very seldom given to making any such inquiries concerning particular individuals, and Minnie knew she had a motive in making this one, although she guessed this motive other than it was.

Answering Ruth's question with the same freedom with which she had answered every other question of that dear friend for many years past, and which had been as much of a safeguard to her as of a happiness, she said :

'No, dear Miss Ruthie ; I do not think Dick really a religious man. Aunty does. She told me yesterday how happy it had made her to see him come to the Holy Communion with us. And you see how regular he is at church, coming with me even on week-days. But still I don't think him religious—though, of course, I would not judge him ; and I would not say this to anyone but you, or even to you if you had not asked me. I know why you ask, Miss Ruthie. It is because we are so much together, and I am so giddy and worldly, you are afraid of his making me more so. But you need not be afraid, for he would never have any influence over me at all. People here think him *very* good. The old lady opposite told me one day that my handsome cousin gave

her the idea of a young man who had never done anything wrong in his life! And that is just the idea he would give to anyone who did not know anything about him. Oh, Miss Ruthie, when I look at him, it often makes me think of Johnnie Grainger, and how different he is even now! Perhaps this is why I can't think Dick really good, because he seems so very well satisfied with himself, and holds his head so very high. Does not it seem strange that he can do so here, Miss Ruthie, where so many people must remember the past?'

But instead of answering this question, Ruth said:

'No one person can judge correctly of another's real feelings, or even actions. Perhaps I ought not to have said so much about your cousin as I have; but, as you say, Minnie, I was anxious about you, knowing how easily you are influenced by those with whom you are thrown into constant companionship, especially if they are at all fascinating in looks or manner.'

'People call Dick very fascinating. I can't see it,' replied Minnie; 'and I don't care for his manners at all; they are *so* conceited, Miss Ruthie.'

'Well, Minnie, we won't talk any more about him. As I said just now, perhaps I ought not to have said so much.'

And she turned the conversation into another channel.

But on the very next evening it was renewed once more, this time, however, between herself and her father. To her great surprise, as they were returning together from a practice at the Mission-room, in which Richard Taylor had been taking a very prominent part, Mr. Heathcote asked her very much the same question which she had asked Minnie.

'I don't know what to think of him, father,' she said. 'But why do you ask me? You are a much better judge than I am.'

'You have seen a great deal more of him than I have,

Ruth, and under more familiar circumstances. I confess I don't feel satisfied with the young man.'

'Nor am I, father; and it troubles me, because he is so very much with Minnie.'

'And me,' said her father, 'because he wishes to teach in our Sunday-school during the six months he will be at Little Burton.'

'To secure him a walk to and fro with Minnie every Sunday afternoon, perhaps, father.' And then she added, 'I did not mean to be uncharitable. I only said it for fun.'

'Many a true word is said in jest, Minnie,' said Mr. Heathcote gravely, 'and I expect that *is* young Taylor's reason. He does not give me the idea of being sincerely religious. I should not like to be unjust to him, and this is why I am asking you for your impression of him.'

Mr. Heathcote did not tell Ruth that he had been struck by the gloom—almost, it might have been called, the scowl—that he had observed to pass over Richard's face when, as the communicants were in the very act of approaching the Holy Table on the previous Sunday, young John Grainger had accidentally passed before Richard Taylor and knelt in the place which otherwise would have been his, beside Minnie Davis. But it had made a very painful impression upon him.

The scowl had remained upon Richard's countenance; his manner had been absent and wandering; there had been no outward sign of the deep inward devotion that should accompany so solemn an act of holy worship, even when he had taken into his hands the broken bread and the cup of blessing. Connecting this circumstance with others which had come to his notice during the short time that had passed since Richard Taylor had returned to Little Burton, he felt, as he had said to Ruth, very much the reverse of satisfied about him.

Richard had answered every question put to him most satisfactorily. His knowledge of all doctrines necessary to salvation was complete. And there was nothing in his outward conduct which anyone could lay hold of to prove that he was not sincere in his profession of religion. Yet as he knelt that day beside John Grainger, some such thoughts forced themselves into the clergyman's mind as had already found their way into Minnie's. Evidently, from all that had been heard of him since he had left Little Burton years ago in disgrace, he had been leading an altogether new life. But a new life does not always mean a life animated by a new spirit. Mrs. Taylor had shown the Vicar the excellent testimonials which Richard had brought with him from his employers in New York. She had spoken of these as though they were in themselves proofs of her son's being altogether a changed man, bent on following the commandments of God and walking in His holy ways. Mr. Heathcote saw that she was fully satisfied. But he was not. Even before the previous Sunday he had not been. But on that day, when he observed him at the Holy Communion, kneeling indeed upon his knees, but certainly not 'meekly,' he felt that no one who was in love and charity with all men could have worn that frown upon his face, nor would the humble petition made to Almighty God for pardon for past sins have been offered with such indifference of manner, or in such an undevout tone, by anyone who was feeling true and earnest repentance for those sins.

CHAPTER X.

HOLY COMMUNION.

Mr. Abbott came out of his wife's boudoir as Ruth Heathcote came into it. He stopped for an instant to give her the specially friendly greeting which Mrs. Abbott often said laughingly he reserved purposely for her. Ruth was his invalid wife's one chief friend, her greatest comfort in this world, himself and little Margery only excepted; and therefore Mr. Abbott's friendliness of feeling for her was greater perhaps than for anyone else. Being in a hurry now, his greeting consisted only of a very welcoming smile and the words:

'I have just been telling Mrs. Abbott something that will interest you. I know you like Mrs. Job Taylor, though she is not a favourite with many of the people here.'

Yes, Ruth did like Mrs. Taylor very much; she liked her for her own sake, for the strength of character and the high principle which had enabled her to return to Little Burton in spite of past associations and present shame, rather than debar herself from the privileges of Mr. Heathcote's spiritual instruction and support. And she liked her still more for her behaviour towards Minnie—for the nobility of mind which made her openly confess how completely she had allowed prejudice and jealousy to lead her to misjudge her niece in former times, and the true repentance for that mistaken past which had led her to strive con-

stantly to make her happy in the present. No mother could have been more kind to her own child than Mrs. Job Taylor was to her niece; and in no surer way could she find favour with Ruth Heathcote than by kindness to Minnie Davis.

But she did not like her son Richard, and Mr. Abbott had been mistaken in imagining that the piece of intelligence which he had just communicated to his wife would give Ruth any pleasure when Mrs. Abbott should communicate it to her.

'My husband has given her son a permanent situation in the office,' she said, in reply to Ruth's inquiry as to what there was to tell about Mrs. Job Taylor. 'She is more delighted than words can say at his remaining here.'

'Which is more than you look, Ruthie,' she added.

'And which is more than I am,' said Ruth, with such a very grave expression that Mrs. Abbott laughed.

'You don't like the young man,' she said. 'Yet he seems a nice young fellow, from the little I have seen of him. I was lying on the drawing-room sofa last night when he came to speak to Mr. Abbott, and he had him shown into the drawing-room on purpose to get my opinion of him, for it is rather a responsible post that he will hold in the office. My husband said that he would be very sorry to give it to him unless he was now really worthy of it, and yet he would be equally sorry to reject him on account of anything that had happened in the past. He has the highest opinion of Mrs. Taylor.'

'And, I am sure, so have I,' interrupted Ruth, 'though I think her infatuated about her son.'

'A natural infatuation, poor thing!' said Mrs. Abbott, the thought rising in her mind that for once Ruth was a little hard; 'especially when she has no one else to live for. This is just what inclined William so much to favour the young man. He thinks that Mrs. Taylor has borne her past shame so bravely—it must have been a terrible trial, for

he says she is a very proud woman—and he admires her so much for this that it would be a real pleasure to him to help in removing every remains of the cloud still hanging over her life by putting her son into an honourable post in this very place. You know, Ruthie,' she added, 'we have to follow our Lord's example in all things in which He gives us the opportunity of doing so. I never saw anyone who strove to do so more than my husband does. And when God forgives, He forgives freely, and heaps kindnesses on those who have offended Him. He quite forgets the past —casts it into the depths of the sea.'

And one of its sweetest smiles passed over the thin, pale face as she put her hand into Ruth's and said :

'I am afraid, Ruthie, *you* don't forget, at all events, as regards Richard Taylor.'

'I am quite sure, dear Mrs. Abbott, that *he* does,' she answered. 'This is just what prejudices me most against him.'

'Oh, Ruthie ! what an inconsistent child you are, to be sure !' exclaimed Mrs. Abbott. 'It was only last week that you were deploring that even now—after years of good conduct—your particular favourite, young Grainger, should be still walking softly on account of an offence committed almost in his childhood. You said it had quite vexed you to see that Mr. Prescott did not fully appreciate him and his talents and his real strength of character, on account of the diffidence of manner and want of self-confidence which had clung to him ever since that long-ago time when his mother was starving, and he could get no work, and was tempted to snatch a loaf from a baker's counter to carry home to her. And now you are taking up an entirely opposite line of argument with regard to Richard Taylor, and his repentance for the sin he committed, almost as many years ago, in stealing that ten-pound note from William's office.'

The question, 'Is it repentance?' passed involuntarily

across Ruth's mind; but this was not a thought to be expressed even to such a friend as Mrs. Abbott.

Indeed, she felt that she could say nothing further about Richard Taylor without going beyond that narrow boundary of charity which is so easily—often so unconsciously—passed over in conversation with intimate friends, and finding herself on the forbidden ground of evil speaking and rash judging.

'Perhaps I am prejudiced,' she said; 'I believe I am. But I don't think the past has so much to do with my feelings as the present. You always tell me I allow myself to be too much influenced by manner.'

'But young Taylor's manners are just what anyone must like,' said Mrs. Abbott. 'I was charmed with him last night when he was talking to Mr. Abbott.'

Ruth did not reply.

The deed was done. Richard Taylor was appointed to the vacant post in the office. Even if he had not been she would not have sought to prevent it. She knew nothing against him. She would not even have said that, had Richard Taylor been talking freely and familiarly to his mother or to Minnie, Mrs. Abbott might not perhaps have been so much delighted with his manner as she had been when, by means of it, he was seeking to regain favour with his former employer, and to obtain from him the situation which, at this moment, was the thing of all others that he most desired.

She was only very glad that the entrance of little Margery from her morning walk, the roses in her cheeks deepened into yet more loveliness, and her soft glossy curls blown into yet more artistic beauty by the wind, at once turned the conversation to a pleasanter subject.

On her way home she went into Mrs. Taylor's to congratulate her. It had to be done; and whatever must be done had better be done, Ruth always thought, as soon as

possible, especially if it were likely to be at all difficult or disagreeable in the doing.

Richard Taylor was at home, elated with pride and pleasure, talking eagerly of future plans and prospects, to all which talk his mother listened with such proud happiness upon her face as Ruth had never seen there before, Minnie Davis meanwhile sewing quietly beside the window, without once raising her eyes from her work or uttering a word.

But Ruth knew, by the expression of the little face she had studied so closely from childhood, that it would be no personal pleasure to pretty Minnie Davis to have her cousin Richard as a constant inmate in the house which circumstances had made her home.

And she knew, too, that a struggle was going on in Minnie's mind between what she felt and what she told herself she ought to feel. Which was true. At that moment she was saying to herself:

'Such joy as it is to auntie—I am a wicked, selfish girl not to feel entirely glad for her sake, and forget myself altogether.'

This was what Minnie Davis was striving to feel. But she could not succeed. In spite of the efforts and struggles that were making her light fingers fly with even more swiftness than usual over her work, what she *did* feel was that the home in Sunnyside Place would never again be the free happy home to her that it had been when she and her aunt lived alone in it, and that she would like so much—so very much—to go out as a governess.

Only she knew that to propose such a thing to her aunt would rouse her indignation to the utmost, and grieve her heart also, and take away much of the delight that was now filling it.

Nor was Minnie Davis the only person in Little Burton to whom the news of Richard Taylor's good fortune had brought heart struggles.

'It seems so hard,' said Widow Grainger, her always somewhat melancholy voice assuming a yet more melancholy tone than usual. 'It would have been such a thing for me if my boy had only got that place—always at home with us, and keeping early hours. And I believe he might have had it for the asking, if he only would have asked.'

'We don't know that,' replied old David; 'we don't know that, Mrs. Grainger. I'm not much given to gossip, as you know, and I generally try to put a check on my friend Hannah when she comes in to sit with me full of one thing or another. But I am sufficiently interested, both in Dick Taylor and Minnie Davis, to have given her my full attention last night, when she was telling me how thick they were together, and that it will be a match between them.'

'So folks say,' replied Mrs. Grainger.

And her voice was even less cheerful, though she refrained from expressing aloud the thought that was in her mind, that some people seemed to get everything they wanted, and that often those who seemed to deserve the least were just those who got the most.

'Well, they'll be a handsome young couple,' said the old man, 'from what folks say. Dick Taylor was as good-looking a fellow as ever I set my eyes on when they had power to see, and I hear he has grown a deal handsomer since he went away; and they tell me little Minnie Davis grows prettier every day, though, for my part, I can't fancy anything much prettier than the lassie was before I lost sight of her and the rest of this world's fair things. But that's neither here nor there. What I was going to say was that if Dick Taylor and Minnie Davis have made it up together, then anyone can understand Mr. Abbott's giving the place to Dick.

'I don't see why,' said Mrs. Grainger gloomily. 'He was

not so fond of the father that he should favour the son for his sake, and I am sure Dick did not behave so well as to deserve to be favoured for his own.'

'But is not little Minnie the special pet and charge of Miss Ruth, Mrs. Grainger?'

'I believe she is,' replied the widow, rather testily, 'though I don't know why you call her little, Mr. Graham, when she's about the tallest girl in the place.'

'Habit, Mrs. Grainger,' said the old man; 'habit is second nature, and I've got the habit of thinking of her as she was when I last saw her, although I've heard folks say often enough that the lassie has shot up like a poplar-tree. Well, then, is not Minnie Davis the special pet of Miss Ruth, and is not Miss Ruth the chief friend and comfort of poor young Mrs. Abbott, and is not Mr. Abbott ready to do anything and everything that his sick wife asks him? Minnie spoke up for her cousin to Miss Ruth, and she spoke up for him to Mrs. Abbott, and Mrs. Abbott to the master, and so it came about; and, perhaps, it's a very good thing that you could not get John to put in his claim, for I know the master would have been sorry to have turned a deaf ear to it, yet I believe he would refuse anybody anything rather than cross Mrs. Abbott in the veriest trifle.'

'Well, no doubt you are right,' said Mrs. Grainger. And she ended the conversation as she had begun it, with the words, 'It's very hard, though. I am sure my boy must feel it so after working all this while in the office. He won't let me see it, but no doubt his heart is sore.'

'I'm afraid it is,' said old David gravely. 'I'm very much afraid it is, poor lad!'

But in this, old David Graham and Mrs. Grainger were as mistaken as they had been in some of their previous conclusions.

There was no soreness in John Grainger's heart at that moment.

There had been, during several previous weeks, a soreness which was new and strange to the lad, and very painful, and which was connected with Richard Taylor; but not in the way that his mother or the old pensioner imagined. It had cost him no trouble at all to hear that Taylor was appointed to a situation in the office which was higher and more lucrative than his own, but it had cost him a great deal—and that for many weeks—that Taylor should have become the constant companion of Minnie Davis, and just of late it turned him sick at heart to hear folks say—as Hannah truly said they were saying—that it would be a companionship not of weeks, or of months, but for life.

Not that John Grainger had ever for a moment entertained the thought of winning that companionship for himself. Living as he had been doing for years in the same place with Minnie Davis, thrown into constant intercourse with her at the Sunday-school, in his mother's house—here, there, and everywhere—he had been content to admire her beyond anyone he had ever seen or could ever hope to see. There was nothing he would not have done for her. But he had never thought about his regard for her—never questioned its nature, or its reasonableness. Nor, indeed, did he do so now. Only when he saw Richard Taylor constantly with her, a feeling of dislike towards him rose in his mind such as he had never imagined he could ever have felt towards any living being. There was no reason why he should dislike Dick, but he, who had never felt any real dislike to anyone before, felt as if he hated him. He had never talked much himself to Minnie. Shy and self-diffident, he preferred seeing her with others, and listening to her bright intelligent converse with them, to talking to her himself. She was so much his superior; he had such a sense of his own inferiority. But he could not bear to see her with Richard. Many times lately, when he had come upon them walking together, he had turned into another

street to avoid meeting them, and running the chance of having to speak to them.

For the first time in his life, John Grainger had been realizing what it was *not* to be in love and charity with all his neighbours.

But of these feelings, or rather of their cause, he had said nothing to anyone, until a few days ago his old friend, Mr. Graham, had made some allusion to the Holy Communion on the following Sunday, when he replied :

'I shall not be there, Mr. Graham.'

And in answer to the old soldier's surprised question :

'But why not, my son?'

'I can't tell you about it,' he said ; 'indeed, I don't understand it myself. But I feel one thing. The command is very clear that we must be in love and charity with everyone. And that is just what I am *not*.'

'With Dick Taylor?' said the old man. And he did not ask why, for he thought he knew. 'And you are willing to feel so, are you, Johnnie? you are cherishing this dislike for him?'

'No, I am not, Mr. Graham. I'm very unhappy about it.'

'Then go to the Holy Communion and get rid of it, my lad. There's no better way of doing so. I know something of that feeling. One does not live to be over fourscore without knowing something of the manifold sins and wickedness which hinder and grieve every soldier who is fighting the spiritual battle. But don't keep away from the Lord's Table on account of a sin struggling within your soul—a temptation you feel yourself powerless to overcome. Go to the best of all means for obtaining pardon and strength.'

And Johnnie went.

And both the pardon and the strength were realized. So absorbed was he in the full consciousness of his Lord's presence with him, as he drew near with faith to take

with comfort the Holy Sacrament, having made his humble confession to Almighty God, that he was not even aware that in doing so he stepped before Richard Taylor, and it was without any intention on his part that he found himself meekly kneeling beside Minnie Davis. He did not even perceive the dark frown on Richard Taylor's face as he rose from his knees with a look of entire peace on his own.

The burden of the sin which had been weighing on his tender conscience was no longer intolerable. The remembrance of it had ceased to be grievous. He had truly acknowledged and bewailed it to Almighty God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who had died to atone for it, as for every other sin which he, or any of His people, had committed by thought, word, or deed against His Divine Majesty. And he no longer shrank from the thought of God's wrath or indignation. For he had the witness within his soul that his repentance was sincere and his sorrow hearty.

The words of Absolution—that Absolution which has fallen with healing power upon so many thousands of contrite hearts for so many hundreds of years—had brought peace to his soul.

With hearty repentance and true faith, he had turned to his heavenly Father, and Almighty God had pardoned him, and delivered him from the power of every evil spirit struggling within him, and was once more confirming and strengthening him in all goodness.

CHAPTER XI.

HOLY COMMUNION.

'I DON'T need to look at your face, my lad, to know that it's all right with you again,' was the old pensioner's first remark to the young man, whom he loved quite as truly as though he were in reality what he considered him by adoption, his grandson.

The tone of Johnnie's voice had sufficed to show him that the demon of jealousy, whose possession of the lad's heart the old man had fully perceived—though quite mistaken as to what had given it entrance there—had been driven from it.

And then he added: 'Ever since yesterday has it been, Johnnie? I thought it would be so when I found you had taken my advice. I was sure you would find the reward. Ah! Johnnie, my lad, I've often felt a great delight in going up to the Table to know you were with me. But never more than I did yesterday; at least, never more since the first day you came. I thought of you all through the service; mostly in those comfortable words of our Saviour, Christ Himself, to all who truly turn to Him. Never were words more aptly named. I heard your voice, Johnnie, in the versicles that follow them, and I knew—yes, I knew just as well by the tone of it as though I could have read your heart—that you were lifting up both heart and voice in giving thanks to the Lord. As it is meet, right, and our

bounden duty to do,' he continued, 'at all times and in all places. But mostly *then*, Johnnie, when we are commemorating before our God the one great sacrifice on Mount Calvary which is the means of our salvation. Mostly *there*, Johnnie, before that Holy Table where God in His Blessed Sacrament brings to us the richest gift His love can give us in the Body and Blood of our crucified Lord.'

Johnnie made no reply; but the old man knew that his words were not falling on an inattentive ear, and, his heart warm with the subject, he went on:

'The angels and archangels and all the company of heaven join in those thanks, and are ready to praise and magnify the thrice Holy Lord of Hosts, whose glory fills all heaven and earth. But yet *they* have not so much cause to render thanks for this mercy as we have. They may, and the Bible tells us that they do, look on and wonder and glorify God for the mysteries of Redemption; but it is only those who were lost and have been redeemed, only those for whom the dear Lord's Body was broken, only those for whom His precious Blood was shed, for whom this oblation was offered, who can laud and worship and glorify, and give thanks to God for all the benefits of His passion.'

The entrance of Mrs. Grainger interrupted the conversation, but did not divert Johnnie's mind from dwelling upon it as he took his supper quietly, not listening much to his mother's report of her evening's work at the public laundry, where she was now manager, with several women under her, until she said:

'Oh, by the way, Johnnie, I have a message for you from Miss Ruth. Mr. Prescott is giving the choir a treat. He means to take them to Bolton on Wednesday. He wants you to come and help him to take care of them.'

John's first inquiry was whether his mother knew who else was going.

'Miss Ruth I know is to be there.' Then, after a a moment's pause, she added, 'And Minnie Davis I know is going.'

'And of course Richard Taylor,' was John's inward rejoinder. But he said nothing. Richard Taylor he knew was no pleasant subject to his mother. Only in his mind he resolved to find some sufficient excuse for not joining the choir picnic on Wednesday.

Now, old David, as we know, could no longer guess, with his Scotch acuteness, from any look upon any face, what feelings were at work within; yet the very silence that fell upon the conversation after that mention of the choir picnic gave him quite as correct a clue to the thoughts that were stirring in the minds he knew so well as though his keen gray eyes had been fixed upon their faces, or they had expressed those thoughts aloud.

'Are you going to this picnic on Wednesday, Johnnie?' he said the next morning, seizing the opportunity to ask the question while Mrs. Grainger was fetching the milk for their morning meal from the neighbouring dairy, and Johnnie was busy with his shoe-blacking and knife-cleaning.

'I don't know, sir,' said Johnnie, whose inmost feelings led him to treat the old soldier with quite as much reverence now that he was a grown man nearly six feet high, and a clerk in Mr. Abbott's warehouse, as ever he had done in the days when he was a very poor little errand-boy.

'What's to prevent you, lad?' was the next short, sharp, yet kindly question.

Not being able to give a truthful answer to it, John was silent.

'Not any unkind feelings lingering in your mind towards Dick Taylor, I hope?' said the old man.

Again John was silent. But David had no fear that his silence arose from any offence he had given him. His intercourse with John Grainger had been of too intimate a

character from the boy's very childhood for there to be any fear of this. David could never beat about the bush in anything he had to say to anybody ; but to Johnnie it would have been as unnecessary as it was impossible.

'I know you're tempted to be jealous of Dick, my lad,' he said ; 'I can understand your being so. But it must not be, Johnnie ; it must not be. You got rid of these feelings last Sunday. And they came back again last night. You did not like to think of his being there in a better position than you will be—a position, too, which perhaps you think, as I know your mother does, you have more right to hold than he has. Back came the wrong feelings when you thought of meeting him on Wednesday. That's the way with our spiritual enemies, Johnnie, just as it is with our temporal ones. I have not been a soldier all these long years without knowing how it is. We have a hard fight of it, and come off victorious with some bad wounds, perhaps, but proud and thankful because the battle is over, and we have beaten back our foes. We think they're gone, but they are only in ambush—ready to return as soon as they can find an opportunity. There's no laying down our weapons—no possibility of getting into safety this side the grave. Only let one fancy that there's no need to watch, and the enemy is on one in a moment. Don't let him get the better of you now, after having defeated him a day or two ago.'

John made no answer, but there was a warmer grasp than usual in the hand which, as was his daily custom, he gave to the old pensioner before setting out for his work, no longer intending now to refuse the invitation to the choir picnic, though it should be accompanied with the information that Richard Taylor was to be there also.

Meanwhile old David prepared for a solitary day. Mrs. Grainger would be away until evening, and he would be dependent for companionship on his own thoughts, and

such stray visitors as might take pity on his loneliness. But these were never very numerous in the day-time, for the people of Little Burton were all working folks, with little leisure for aught beside the earning of their daily bread. It was on days like this that David most missed his dear 'Miss Helen,' now that she was settled in her own home at a distance from him. It was true that she had committed the charge of her favourite parishioner—doubly dear to her since his blindness had come upon him—to Ruth's special care. And Ruth had been very attentive to him. But during the last fortnight her time had naturally been too much occupied with Mr. Prescott to allow of her coming often to see him, and he was not at all expecting her when she appeared.

She had come to repeat herself the invitation to Johnnie which she had already sent him through his mother.

'But that was not my only reason,' she said; 'Mr. Prescott has gone to London on business, and I had a free afternoon. I don't get many now, David.'

'No, Miss Ruthie, and I don't expect you want to either. There are some things we don't easily forget, Miss Ruthie. It's near on seventy years ago since I were courting, but it's as fresh in my memory now as though it was but seven. I know I was not best pleased when I could not get her all to myself. I'm afraid I was a bit selfish on that one subject. But I don't think she found the bondage very hard, and I don't expect you do either, Miss Ruthie.'

Ruth laughed—the old merry laugh of her childhood which David loved so well to hear. For a little while that laugh had not been heard so frequently as those who loved her would have desired, but now it rang out as lightly as ever, with perhaps an added note or two of happiness in it.

'I can't say I do, David, but for all that I am sorry sometimes not to be able to come and see my friends, especially you. I am afraid you must often be very lonely.'

'Not so lonely as you might think, Miss Ruthie. The good God makes up to us for what He takes away from us in a manner that must be felt to be believed. I never realized His presence as fully in the light as He has enabled me to do in the darkness.'

'It must be so hard not to be able to read,' said Ruth, 'especially for you, David. Why, you were *always* reading either your Bible or your Prayer-book.'

'I thank God I was, Miss Ruth; and as you say, that is the greatest privation of all. But oh, it *is* a blessing to have so much of those precious books laid up in my memory! *That* is as clear as ever; and as I sit here hour after hour, meditating on passage after passage, the Holy Spirit shines down into my heart, and it often seems to me as if I could read more of God's truth there now than ever I read it in the printed page. What do you think, now, I have been busy with all this afternoon, Miss Ruth? and the time has passed so quickly. I've been trying to make out as many types of the Holy Communion as I could find in the Old Testament.'

'And you have found a great many, I am sure,' said Ruth, who had gone into this same subject not very long ago with her 'dear boys,' as she still called her Sunday-class, though many of its members now were only boys to *her*, and would have been very much offended if any one had looked upon them as other than young men. 'The first was the Tree of Life of which we read in Genesis, was it not, David?'

'And hear of again in Revelation, Miss Ruthie—that is a favourite type of mine. I've spoken of it many times with the minister. We don't go far in the Bible, do we, before we get a proof of what your good father first taught me to understand?—what he calls the Sacramental principle.'

'The outward sign and the inward grace,' said Ruth,

to whom such teaching had been familiar from childhood.

'That's it, Miss Ruth; and don't we find this clearly in that Tree of Life, the partaking of which could keep men alive from death? Does it not represent the power there is in the Holy Sacrament to preserve unto everlasting life the bodies and souls of those who faithfully partake of it?'

'Like the manna,' said Ruth.

'Like the manna,' the old man repeated—'the mysterious food supplied from heaven by God Himself for the sustenance of His own people in the desert. Just as now the Lord Jesus, the true Bread of Life, gives Himself to be the spiritual food of the faithful in the Blessed Sacrament. And then we have the Feast of Melchisedek, the King of Salem and Prince of Peace. He was a type of Christ's priesthood; and we see him bringing the sacred elements, "bread and wine."'

'And the food supplied by a miracle to Elijah when he was on his way to Mount Horeb—the Mount of God—to support him in the journey that was too difficult for him,' said Ruth. 'I like so much to think of this type, David,' she added, 'because the way to heaven *does* often seem rather a hard one.'

'Too hard for our unassisted strength, Miss Ruthie; and so the Lord says to us in His Holy Sacrament, as the angel said to Elijah when he lay fainting under the juniper tree, "Arise, and eat!" And when we obey, and eat and drink the Bread and Wine, we can go in the strength of that meat, and no longer feel faint. It will keep us all the way to the true Zion of which Horeb was but a type. You know that verse in Proverbs, Miss Ruth, where Wisdom, representing, as we know, the Lord Jesus, bids all who need understanding, all who desire to forsake folly and live eternally, to find the needful strength to do so in eating of His Bread and drinking of the Wine which He has

mingled. And it is not only under the figure of food that we have the Holy Sacrament set before us in the Old Testament, Miss Ruth,' continued the old man.

'No,' said Ruth; 'the Passover was of course the principal of all the types of the Holy Sacrament.'

'And that type prefigures it chiefly as the memorial of a sacrifice, Miss Ruth—the one great sacrifice which every member of the Jewish Church was bound to offer. They were to sacrifice the Paschal Lamb before they ate it. And, oh, with what thankfulness they must have offered it and eaten of it on every after occasion, as they remembered that awful time of its first institution, when the destroying angel passed over the land, and every believing soul was saved from death by means of it. And that is just how we should feel every time we partake of the Lord's Supper. Christ, our Passover, is sacrificed for us. The everlasting death from which the angel of the New Covenant delivers us is a far more terrible destruction than that which threatened the Israelites of old. You are quite right, Miss Ruth; the Passover is the chief of all the types. Offered first as a memorial of our deliverance from death, and then eaten for the sustenance and refreshment of our souls. And there are other types of this same sacrificial nature.'

'Yes,' said Ruth; 'the Shew-bread is a lesser type of the same sort. It was offered to God every Sabbath Day as a memorial before the Lord, and then consumed by the priest, after having remained for a week on God's Table.'

'Oh, Miss Ruthie, how interesting all these things are if one only gives one's mind to them! I know you have been studying this very subject quite lately, for my Johnnie told me so.'

'We have been looking over the Bible types at the class,' said Ruth, 'and have just come to those which prefigure the Lord's Supper. I had not known myself, or at all events I had not remembered that there were so many.

'Jacob's Ladder,' said the old man.

'We had taken that before as a type of our Lord's incarnation,' said Ruth.

'And so it is, Miss Ruth—a very clear type, for it reached from heaven to earth, uniting two worlds together, just as our Lord Himself does in his Humanity and His Divinity. But I think we may also take this holy ladder, "peopled by angels," as a very true representation of the Eucharist, the greatest of all means by which faithful souls on earth are united with their Redeemer in heaven. And the Burning Bush,' he continued, 'which, though it burned continually, was not consumed, and the place whereon it stood was holy ground. There is an abundance of Old Testament types to foretell the institution of this sacrament. It's very pleasant to talk of such things to those who can sympathize in one's interest in them. Such conversations always make me think so much of Miss Helen. We've spent hours together over them.'

'She was always more interested in good things than I was, David.'

'But I think, Miss Ruthie, you're growing to be almost as interested in them as she used to be.'

'If so, David, it's owing to Mr. Prescott. One can't be with him and not grow better for it, or, at all events, try to be better. He is *so* good.'

'So I hear, Miss Ruthie, and, indeed, so I can tell, though it is but little I know of him. But every tone of his voice rings as true as our beautiful church bells, and I judge a deal by that. I've got to know people wonderfully by the tone of their voices. But I should like to see him, Miss Ruthie. Thank God, my eyes had got every feature in the face of Miss Helen's husband off by heart, but I should have dearly liked to see the gentleman that is to be husband to our little Miss Ruthie.'

'He is not handsome, you know, David—not half as good-looking as Mr. Moorhouse.'

'Handsome is that handsome does, Miss Ruthie.'

'Well then, David, on that principle he is *very* handsome.'

'So I should say, indeed, Miss Ruthie, from all I hear. But, besides, it seems to me he can't be far from handsome in other ways too. Tall and very straight, with a high forehead, and clear, brown eyes, and a firm, kind mouth.'

Ruth laughed merrily.

'Who has been telling you all this, David?'

'My Johnnie, Miss Ruthie. I often sit and question him.'

'And he has given you very correct answers, David. But I must run away now, or the tall, straight figure will be standing waiting for me at the Vicarage door, instead of my being there to welcome him back; and then, David, I'm not quite sure whether the look in the clear brown eyes will be altogether so pleasant as usual, or the firm mouth may not open for just a word or two of discontent.'

CHAPTER XII.

HOLY COMMUNION.

THE tall, upright figure was not waiting, as Ruth had feared it might be, somewhat impatiently in the Vicarage hall, for she had scarcely finished speaking when a short, decided knock, which she recognised at once, made itself heard, and Mr. Prescott stood in the doorway of old David's house.

'You have come by an earlier train, and I was not at home to meet you,' she said.

'And so I have come down to look for you here, and we shall have a walk back together. But first I must be allowed a few words with your friend—the only friend,' he said, turning to the old man and taking his hand, 'of whom I am at all jealous. I tell Miss Ruth that the moment my back is turned she is off to see you, Mr. Graham.'

And sitting down in the chair which Ruth had vacated, he entered into such pleasant converse with the old man as made him feel happier than ever about the gentleman of whom all spoke so well, and who was to be 'husband to little Miss Ruthie.'

'He would not have such a voice as that,' he said to himself, as the door closed upon his visitors, 'if he were not good and true all through. He might say the same words perhaps, but it would not be in the same tone. I never used to think so much about people's voices when I

could look at their faces and see the expression there. But it's different now, and I've learned to judge of what folks are like pretty near as well by the sound of their voice as ever I did by the look on their face. And I never heard one I liked better than I do his—pleasant and tender, and so manly too.'

Still more pleasantly did that same voice sound in Ruth's ears, as she listened to its account of the day's events, which were more than especially interesting to her, for Mr. Prescott had been down into the country to see a picturesque spot where it was proposed to build a new church, and which he had decided to make the scene of the picnic he was giving, in honour of his engagement, to the choristers and the boys of Ruth's Sunday class.

'It is a lovely spot,' he said, 'and the journey down there will be an additional treat to the lads, for it carries us well beyond the smoky streets and tall chimneys to which they are accustomed, out into fair fields and amongst pleasant farms and country houses.'

And then they talked of the little church that was to be built there, in an outlying hamlet some miles away from the parish church, and Mr. Prescott promised Ruth that on the day of the picnic he would take her a few miles further on to see a neighbouring church which was to serve as a model—almost his ideal of a village church.

'I mean to send Herbert down to superintend a great part of the work,' he said; 'it will bring him near home, and he can stay frequently with you.'

And then they spoke of Herbert, and the daily-increasing love of architecture—especially of church architecture—which the boy displayed, and Ruth's eyes filled with grateful tears, and her voice was full of thankful love as she commented, as so often before, on all that Mr. Prescott had been to her only brother.

It had been a great blessing—one that would last all

through his life—to have discovered in what direction the boy's talent lay, and what was the vocation marked out for him by God's providence. But it had been a much greater blessing than this, a blessing the results of which would extend far beyond this world's gain and honour into the endless eternal life, to have been the means of bringing that anxious young mind out of the difficulties of a doubting, diffident nature, and establishing it firmly in the comfortable faith of the Church.

They spoke of this also, and especially of the happiness it was to both of them never now to see Herbert absent from that Holy Communion to which in former days nothing could persuade him to come.

'He often says what false humility it was,' said Ruth.

'Not humility at all, Ruth,' Mr. Prescott replied. 'Herbert sees this clearly now. He fully understands how useless it was for him to be hoping to make any Christian progress whilst voluntarily absenting himself from the chief means of grace. He quite realizes that the command of God is clear, and that He will no more accept false excuses from those who disobey it than the king in the parable would listen to the vain excuses of those who rejected his invitation to the supper made ready for them.'

'True humility, Ruthie,' he continued, 'brings us to the Lord's Table; it never keeps us from it—true heart-penitence like that of the Syro-Phœnician woman, to which, you know, the prayer of humble access alludes.'

'I like to hear you talk of the Holy Communion,' said Ruth gravely. 'I never seem to have really understood so much about it as I have since you have talked to me.'

'Perhaps just because you have learned so much, Ruth.'

'Then would you like me to have learned less?' she asked.

The firm, grave mouth smiled a very thoughtful smile.

'Certainly not, Ruthie. We can never learn too much—

never indeed learn enough of those things which belong to salvation. And I believe we shall never in this world learn all there is to know concerning this, the highest of all means of grace allowed to man. The full knowledge of its value is reserved for the world to come, when, at the marriage supper of the Lamb, we shall drink anew of the fruit of the vine in our Father's kingdom. The more I study this sacred subject—and you know, Ruth, we have four separate accounts of it, three by the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and one by St. Paul (received by direct divine revelation)—the more do I feel that there is not one word said, or one circumstance related concerning it, which has not some special teaching for our hearts and lives. I only wish, Ruth, that I had enjoyed in my early life as much instruction on this and other holy subjects as you have. All I meant was, that things which are very familiar to our ear have naturally a tendency to make less impression on our heart, unless by God's grace we keep those hearts continually alive to their spiritual meaning.'

'I am sure old David does,' said Ruth. 'He is nearly ninety, Leonard, and if you could only have heard him to-day! He had been spending the long hours of a lonely afternoon in trying to remember the Old Testament types that prefigure the institution of the Lord's Supper.'

And she repeated part of the conversation, which seemed no more dull to Mr. Prescott in the repetition than it had to herself when she had carried it on with old David Graham.

'And there are other types besides these more evident ones,' he added. I think we may look on the offering called "Mincha," of which we read in Leviticus as accompanying every Jewish sacrifice, and which was "a sweet savour unto the Lord," as another type; and also, Ruth, that mention of Israel on the mount in Exodus, where the nobles saw the God of Israel, and there was under His feet as it were the paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of

heaven in His clearness, and "they did eat and drink." A distinct type, it seems to me, of the privilege granted to us as Christians, when in the Holy Communion God admits us into His immediate presence, and gives us spiritual food to eat and drink. Your good friend says truly that the Old Testament types of the Lord's Supper are very striking; and certainly the New Testament, Ruth, abounds in allusions to this institution.'

'The miracle of the loaves,' said Ruth.

'Which we have our Lord's own authority for considering as a figure of that Living Bread by partaking of which we find life to our souls,' he answered. 'No one can study the New Testament thoughtfully, and, indeed, no one can study the early history of the Primitive Church, without seeing that this ordinance was the "central act" of Divine worship. In it we find embodied every doctrine which our souls need for their salvation, their edification, or their comfort.'

'I remember learning that in the little book father made us study when we were preparing for our first Communion,' said Ruth.

'And I am sure, Ruth, you have found it to be true, and will realize its truth more and more as your knowledge of religion and your experience of life deepens. The Eucharist points us to the sacrifice provided for those transgressions against God's law for which all must answer unless they are washed away for ever by the Blood of the Paschal Lamb. It provides a perpetual remembrance of the one full and perfect sacrifice for their pardon, and the pardon of all the sins which, by our frailty, we daily commit. It tells us of that blessed Intercession by which our great High Priest is for ever pleading His merits before His Father's throne in heaven, whilst we on earth are deploring our infirmities at His footstool. And it is the token and pledge of that glorious Resurrection which, in the future, awaits those who,

having been made partakers here of their Lord's risen life and become "heirs through hope of His everlasting kingdom," and having been preserved in body and soul, will be raised up with Him at the last day.'

Ruth made no reply; but her eyes were fixed attentively on her friend's face, and the expression in them told so clearly of some special thought in her mind of which their earnestness was the reflection, that he said:

'Well, Ruth, what are you thinking?'

'That it is a pity, Leonard, that you are not a clergyman.'

'Why, Ruth? For my own sake?'

'No, Leonard, for the sake of other people. You would preach so well. I am sure you would do so much good. Your heart is full of these things.'

'Yes,' he said, 'it *is* full, though I could often wish that it were much more so. For, after all, Ruth, these are the only things that make life really worth having. Even the best of earth's gifts—even our love for each other, and our bright hopes of happiness together—what real happiness would these things bring us if all were clouded by the gloom of unforgiven sin in the past, uncertainty in the present, and want of hope in the future?'

The colour rose in Ruth's cheek, and quick tears filled her eyes.

'Yes,' she said, 'it is quite true. If you were not what you are, Leonard, I could never have been really *truly* happy as I am.'

He knew what remembrances were in her mind, and returning to their former subject of conversation, he said:

'It may be a pity, for my sake, Ruth, that I could not be, as once I wished, a clergyman. It must be the greatest happiness that can be given to man — as it certainly is the highest honour—to be allowed to spend one's life in ministering Christ's Sacraments and preaching His Gospel. Still, I believe there is much work given one

to do, even in this way, which can be best done by laymen. It is not only in the pulpit that men preach Christ. We should *all* strive to do this, in the street, in the office, in the home, on the cricket-field, everywhere, and by all means.'

CHAPTER XIII.

HOLY COMMUNION.

THERE were very few conversations in which Ruth Heathcote took any part—unless they were of an altogether confidential character—which were not carried second-hand into Mrs. Abbott's sick-room.

'Tell me where you have been to-day?' was the usual question when, her work at home and abroad accomplished, Ruthie ran lightly up the handsome staircase, down which her friend now never came—down which it seemed probable that she would never come more.

And when this first question was answered, the next generally was, 'And what did you talk about?' And the pale face would often grow flushed, and the dim eyes brighten into fresh light, and new smiles play around the white lips, as Ruth described one and another of the day's scenes. Dull and uninteresting enough many of them would have seemed to most people, with nothing in them to make them enjoyable at the time, or worth repeating afterwards. But to Ruth nothing was dull. She threw the light of her own happy nature on everything around her, and made it sparkle by reflection. And yet the happy power had been given to her to see all things in a kindly light, and no word of gossip or of unfriendly remark ever passed her lips. If to the pure all things are pure, so were all things pleasant to her whose very nature was so sweet.

This evening she told her friend of her long, serious talk with old David Graham as they sat very quietly together; for Mr. Prescott and Mr. Abbott were busily engaged in the library, discussing plans for the building of a new and improved dining-hall for the workmen, and Ruth had more leisure than usual to give to her friend.

She was glad of it, for she had seen in a moment that it was what Mrs. Abbott called one of her poor days. Bright and patient an invalid as Mrs. Abbott's self-forgetfulness made her, there were many days when she realized in their most painful degree the special trials and temptations which sickness brings, especially to the sensitive and highly-wrought —days when even her strong courage was toned down by suffering, when long weary hours of sleeplessness had depressed her whole system so much that no amount of self-control could have withheld even her sweet spirit from the utterance of a sharp word, or an exclamation of fretful impatience, had it not been for the power of that heavenly grace which is made perfect in earthly weakness.

Ruth saw at once that this had been such a day with her friend, and that she was in no mood this evening to care for some of Ruth's funny narratives, when she would skilfully imitate all sorts of curious sights and sounds which she had come across in her varied experience, bringing bright sunshiny moments of real mirth into the shadow of the sick-room, until her friend would be roused to the merriest laughter, and declare it was as good as seeing and hearing things for one's self just to listen to Ruth's 'descriptions.'

But to-day had been a very suffering day, and Ruth's prearranged visit to old David had left her lonely during the long hours of the afternoon.

'I hope the dear old man enjoyed your society as much as I missed it,' she said.

'I think he did,' Ruth replied; 'but I should not have

stayed so long if I had known that you were not well. I knew, too, that Mr. Abbott was at home.'

'So he was, but very busy. He was preparing these plans in readiness for Mr. Prescott this evening, and going over estimates. He came in and out constantly, and I would not let him see that I was not well, for he seemed so busy and bothered. I think he has been anxious lately, though he has not said anything about it; and when I have asked him, he always turns the conversation to something else at once, and tells me that I am fanciful. I wonder, Ruth, if all is going well with the workmen. I don't believe William would tell me if it were not.'

'I am sure he would not tell you anything that was not true,' said Ruth, anxious herself to change the subject.

'No, Ruthie, that he never would. But I believe he might not tell me all that was true if he thought it would make me anxious. It was so foolish of that London doctor to say I was never to have the smallest worry. People make such mistakes, too, about what *are* worries. It would trouble me a great deal more to think that William was keeping anything from me, than to know the very worst trouble he could tell me. He did say one day that trade was very bad, and I know that we have been helping the people a great deal more even than usual. I told William the other day that it was a good thing he was such a rich man, or his profuse liberality would soon make him a poor one.'

'And he said?' asked Ruth.

'That he considered it his greatest privilege to be enabled and allowed to give away as much as he could of his money to God. He certainly *does* give. I wonder if the depression of trade is causing much poverty?'

'I suppose it always must,' said Ruth; 'but I am sure none of your people are allowed to suffer. I hear it said constantly how favoured those are who work for Mr. Abbott.'

The pale face lighted up with the peculiar look which Ruth said to herself sometimes it never wore except when she was listening to her husband, or when she herself was speaking of him.

'He *is* good, Ruthie, is he not? I wonder sometimes if there is anyone like him.'

'Not many, I believe,' Ruth answered, with an expression on her own face which seemed to say she knew of one, at all events. 'Mr. Prescott has seen a great deal of life, and his profession brings him into intercourse with a great many men, and he says he has scarcely ever seen anyone whom he could so thoroughly respect and admire as Mr. Abbott. I often wish you could hear him speak of him.'

'He could never say more of him than he deserves, Ruthie. Tell me what he does say?'

'I have told you before,' Ruth said, laughing.

'Well, you can tell me again, Ruthie. I shall never hear it too often.'

'Well, I will you something he said of him to-day, which is very much what I have heard father say. He said that he did not know anyone in whom one could see so clearly the practical result of true church membership, that his whole character seemed to be formed on religious principle—the teaching of the Bible, made clear and rendered practical by the Prayer-book. I should not have told you this, you know,' Ruth added. 'It would have seemed impertinent if you had not asked me. It was to father that he said it, but I was in the room.'

'Your father must have been pleased,' said Mrs. Abbott, more pleased herself than she could tell even to Ruth. 'William often declares that he owes every bit of goodness in him to Mr. Heathcote. He says that all his influence over the men arises from his identifying himself with them, and that it is only since he has realized his position in the Church of Christ that he has had this true feeling of fellow-

ship with all other men, as being fellow-members with him of one great Body. He no longer looks upon himself as an isolated individual, nor even as one member of a useful worldly society, but as bound by the holiest and strongest of ties in a sacred union with all Christ's people. And this feeling, like all other good things, he says he owes to your father. Not that I believe that,' she added, 'for I think he must always have been good, he is so true, so tender, so unselfish. His is a noble nature—so cheerful and yet so serious, so benevolent and yet so economical. Even if he were not as religious as he is, I am sure he would have always been full of plans for the good of the people. Indeed, when first he came home from America to take possession of this property, he was resolved to turn it not only to his own advantage, but to the advantage of everyone connected with it. He knew what the place and the people were like, and he had set his heart on their improvement. But if he had not found your father here, he often says he would have set about this improvement in a very different spirit. And it would have met with very different results.'

'How strange that you should say this to-day!' said Ruth.

'Why, Ruthie, more than on any other day?'

'Because John Preston said almost the same words to me of himself this very morning. He was on his way to the Birmingham Road factory, and we walked a good bit of the road together.'

'And he spoke of Mr. Abbott?'

'No,' said Ruth; 'it was of himself that he was speaking —of himself and of father.'

She did not tell her friend what had led to this conversation, for that would have been only to deepen the anxious fears that she saw had already found their way into her mind; but she added:

'We were talking of the meetings he is holding now for

the people. Father says they do so much good, for he gets some of the men to go to them who never enter a church, and who could never be persuaded to come to any of the Mission-room lectures ; and he said that his was one of those active minds that must always be at work on something. He made me laugh by saying that he believed his wife was right when she told him, as she often did, that he was born with an interfering spirit.'

'Not a very nice spirit to have, Ruthie, though it certainly can be turned to good account, if everybody made as good use of it as John Preston seems to do.'

'And that, he declares, is entirely owing to father. Indeed, I know it is; I can remember the time when he used to be just as great a hindrance to father as he now is a help. He is a very clever man, you know.'

'Yes,' said Mrs. Abbott, 'William does not believe that there is such another clear-headed man in the place.'

'And he says,' replied Ruth, 'that it is only since he has given up the mistaken and foolish ideas that used to confuse his mind that he has become clear-headed. He was always wild about politics, and especially about reform ; but he declares that, starting from a wrong point, he never reached anything but a wrong end, and all his efforts only resulted in making the things he wanted to improve a good deal worse than they were before.'

'I wonder what that starting-point was?' said Mrs. Abbott thoughtfully.

'He told me himself to-day—self-interest and discontent. He could not bear to see others in what he considered better circumstances than his own, and so he set himself, and sought to set others, more and more against the lot in which God's Providence had placed them, and fostered in his own heart, and in their hearts, envy and hatred for all who he fancied were in a higher or happier position.'

'Thus increasing that separation between what people

call the upper and lower classes, which, my husband says, is the chief cause of all the trouble that exists.'

'He said that too,' Ruth answered; 'he told me that in those days he used to neglect his home and his work and waste his money and strength in public-houses—not drinking, for he was always a sober man, but trying to gain influence over others, and lead them to his way of thinking. I believe that is one reason of his great activity now. He would like to make up for all the mischief he considers he has been the means of doing in former days.'

'His desire seems to be realized,' said Mrs. Abbott. 'According to William, there is no one who is so successful as John Preston is undoing the harm that is constantly being done by ignorant, conceited people who go about lecturing on subjects which they themselves don't understand, and fanning the people's discontent, and flattering their vanity, until they positively create a spirit of disaffection and insubordination. Your father has done a good work, Ruth, in leading a man like John Preston to see the error of his ways, and turn his energies into an opposite direction. William tells me that he was a confirmed sceptic when Mr. Heathcote first came to the district and was the means of his conversion.'

'It was not through father's influence that he was brought to see the truth of religion,' replied Ruth, 'but by means of one of his own children.'

And Mrs. Abbott listened with interest while Ruth told how the first ray that had led John Preston out of the darkness of doubt and error into the light of God's truth, made manifest by the teachings of His Holy Church, had come from the innocent talk of his own little son, whose simple Sunday-school lesson on the Creed had led him, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to the discovery of the truth. His love of 'free thought,' which had well-nigh plunged him in the gulf of atheism, had at length found due scope

in the knowledge and practice of the religion of Christ. By the hand of his own little child the chains of error and unbelief that held him fast had been loosened, and he had been led to Christ. And now the Son of God had made him free, and for the first time in his life he felt himself to be free indeed.

'He often says,' continued Ruth, 'that he owes the entire change in his whole life, in the first instance, to his little child, who taught him the truths of the Creed while learning them himself, and then to the teaching of old Mr. Graham. For when his mind became unsettled in his former opinions —indeed, I believe it never was settled in them—he would not go near father, but his boy persuaded him to go and talk with David Graham.'

'Dear old David,' said Mrs. Abbott sadly. 'I never see him now. I have not seen him since the day the church was consecrated. It used to be one of my great pleasures, when I was well enough to go about in my chair, to pay that dear old man a quiet visit. And I have never forgotten that day when he was so ill, and you were all at the sea, and I received the Holy Communion with him.'

'He has never forgotten it either,' said Ruth; 'strangely enough, he spoke of it only this afternoon.'

'I don't think he can remember it as well as I do. Do you know, Ruth, that I always date my real intimacy with your father from that day?'

'You had known him for many years before,' said Ruth.

'Yes; but one may know people and be very friendly too for years, and yet not really intimate, until all of a sudden something brings down the wall of reserve. And the Communion with old David did that for me. I had never received it before with any sick person, and when your father came in to ask me to go with him, saying that there must be three persons present beside the priest, I did not

at all wish to go. It seemed to me that one must have more time for preparation. And that led to the first conversation I ever had with the Vicar on the subject.'

'You did not think then, I dare say, how many you would have afterwards.'

'Indeed I did not, Ruthie. What would my life be now, if it were not for your father's visits—if I could not tell him all that so often disturbs and clouds my mind, and be strengthened and comforted and instructed by his ministrations? But I have always remembered that first earnest talk that we had together. I have often thought in particular of the way in which he said that if one was not in a fit state to receive the Holy Sacrament, one could not be in a fit state to meet one's death, and no one could tell how suddenly *that* summons might come—as it certainly very nearly came to me not long afterwards. I remember it all so well, Ruthie. Often now, when the preparations are being made for my quiet Communions here, I think of that one in old David's room. It was so solemn. Do you know, I never see Tyler laying the damask cloth on that marble slab without remembering David's saying to Mrs. Grainger, who was very nervous and flurried, and scarcely knew what she was about, that there must be a white cloth on the little table beside his bed, and then he turned his dear old face to me and said: "I can't see it, but I like to know it's there—just as we have it at church, dear lady, and just as our Lord's own sacred Body had, when they took it down from the Cross and wrapped it in fine linen." And often, too, Ruthie, when I see your father consuming the remainder of the elements after the celebration, I recall the very tone in which old David said, "They must all be eaten. Nothing of the Paschal Lamb was to be left. It must all be consumed. And Christ is our Passover, sacrificed for us." No sooner had we left the house than your father took up these last words and said, "Yes, that dear

old man speaks truly: Christ is our Passover, sacrificed for us. We have a double sacrifice in this holy ordinance. We commemorate the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus offered on Calvary for us, and we give ourselves to Him—offering to Him our souls and bodies to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice." He has told me since that he came expressly to fetch me that day rather than any other friend, because he did not see me as often as he wished at the Holy Communion. I think he must have felt that I wanted teaching on that solemn subject; and he has indeed given it to me, as patiently and lovingly as though I had been his own daughter.'

'Until you know a great deal more about it than I know,' said Ruth, 'though he has been teaching me all my life, and I have received it regularly ever since I was fourteen.'

'But have never had such need of its strengthening and comforting grace as I have had, Ruthie, during the last few years. Perhaps one needs to stand as near as I have stood at the gates of death—not once or twice, but many times since my accident—really to know how close our dear Lord draws to us in spirit in the participation of the Blessed Sacrament.'

CHAPTER XIV.

HOLY COMMUNION.

THE sun had never shone more brightly on the dingy factory walls and high black chimneys of Little Burton than it shone on the summer morning of 'Mr. Prescott's picnic.' And if it failed to produce any great brightness on these same gloomy walls and chimneys, it found its enlivening effect elsewhere, for rarely had a merrier party been seen than that which assembled on the railway platform to wait for the excursion-train which was to carry them for one short day away from the region of smoke and dust into a new world of clear sunshine, soft breezes, and sweet shade.

Two faces, however, were looking a little anxious, and two devoted mothers exchanged apprehensive words with each other as the minute-hand of the huge clock on the opposite side of the station drew steadily nearer to the appointed hour, and they began to fear lest their 'lads' should not arrive in time to start with the rest of the party.

The picnic to Alverley Priory would bring no pleasure to either Mrs. Job Taylor or Widow Grainger if Richard and John were not there to enjoy it with them.

The porter caught up the big bell close at their side, and nearly deafened them with its clangour. The crowded train swept into the station, and without paying any attention to their entreaties to 'wait for those two young men running

across the line behind it,' the guard bustled the whole party into it with his peremptory 'Get in, get in! you're stopping the passengers behind you.'

But, to their relief, the good mothers saw that the frantic signals they were making to the boys had attracted their attention, and in another moment the two lads, rushing forward, sprang into the carriage where Mrs. Taylor had been keeping places for them almost by force, just as the door which she had kept open was banged by the guard, and the train started.

'This *is* luck,' Richard exclaimed, as he found himself opposite to his Cousin Minnie; and fixing his big black eyes on her, he added, 'I'm glad enough now to have been detained—though my run has taken every bit of breath out of my body.'

Minnie did not respond. She could not say that she was equally glad. But quiet, keen-sighted John Grainger observed the shade of disappointment on her face, and might have been made happier by it than he was if he had not attributed it to the fact of his having jumped into the carriage as well as Richard.

'I've spoiled her trip,' he said to himself. And the thought depressed him so much that he felt his own pleasure to be quite spoiled also.

Richard, on the contrary, was, to use his own expression concerning himself, in 'high feather.' His exuberant spirits rising higher with the gratification his 'good luck' had afforded him, his tongue rattled on more freely than ever. His conversation was addressed almost entirely to Minnie, who, however, responded but little. The answers to his few inquiries—they were but few, for Richard Taylor was more given to relating than to questioning—were supplied by his mother. And so were the few comments which he left anyone time to make on the many things he had to say, which were chiefly concerning himself and his own adventures.

But this Richard evidently did not perceive. Nor did Mrs. Job Taylor, who, sitting opposite to John Grainger, kept her eyes fixed in rapt attention on her son's handsome face, and never turned them once towards the quiet young companion beside her, who, had she thought about her at all, she would have felt sure was quite as much delighted with Richard's talk—for conversation it was not—as she was herself.

John Grainger, however, sitting quietly between his mother and Richard, had eyes and ears for all, but chiefly for Minnie. He was much too shy to send many glances towards her, but the few he did send showed him that she was not listening. It surprised him greatly, for although, to him, much that Richard said seemed boastful and exaggerated and contradictory, he should have supposed that, under the circumstances—almost engaged as people said they were — Minnie Davis's infatuation for Richard would have exceeded Mrs. Taylor's.

Somehow—he could not have said why—Richard's incessant rattling tired him less when he saw how little attention Minnie paid to it, and following the example she had set him, he retreated further into his corner, paying no more heed to it, but enjoying the rare delight of the country sights and sounds through which, after miles of dreary, uninteresting country, they began at length to pass.

Then Minnie's attention became keen. She had eyes for every farmhouse, for every knoll of century-old trees, for every group of cattle resting lazily, or browsing quietly beneath them. Once or twice she directed her aunt's attention to some especially pleasant sight—a party of hay-makers in a newly-mown field, the sweet scent of which swept into their very carriage; a group of village children, with sunburnt rosy faces and arms encircled within each other, on their way to school; the spire of a country church rising in the centre of a pretty hamlet; a rustic inn, with its sign-board swinging on a post in the green in front

of it; a heavily-laden hay-cart, with three or four children perched on its top; but this she ceased to do when she found that every remark she made only served to set Richard's tongue off in a fresh flow. Whatever they saw, he had seen something far more beautiful of the same kind, and had some event or some adventure to narrate about it in which he himself had played the most prominent part.

Finding this to be the case, Minnie ceased to comment on anything she saw, but sat quietly watching these, to her, never-to-be-forgotten country sights, which seemed so much dearer now than ever before, after so many long years of separation from them.

But if John's surprise had been great at perceiving how little attention Minnie had paid to her cousin's talk during the journey, it was destined to be very much greater when, the journey over, the whole party stood once more together outside the station waiting for orders from Mr. Prescott as to how they were to arrange themselves in the four large vans that were waiting to convey them to Bolton Priory.

'Not all the ladies together,' said Mr. Prescott, laughing. 'You must please divide in as equal numbers of each as circumstances allow.'

'I will go with you,' said Minnie quietly to Johnnie; for she had seen what Johnnie also had not failed to remark—the quick step that Richard Taylor had made towards her, almost before he had disengaged his mother from the arm which she had taken to help her portly person down the steps in safety.

'Come, Minnie,' he said.

But Minnie held back for an instant to repeat his words to Johnnie.

'Come, Johnnie,' she said.

And Johnnie came, made much too happy by the request

to care at that moment for the scowl which passed over Richard Taylor's countenance, a scowl which this time he *did* see.

Again was Richard reluctantly obliged to leave his cousin's side. His mother summoned him to help her to mount into the van.

John Grainger seized the opportunity to say :

'I am afraid Richard Taylor is not pleased at your having asked me to come with your party.'

Association is wonderfully electric. In an instant of time Johnnie was carried far away from Alverley Priory, and all the present into the past, when Minnie Davis was a little thing, and they used to play together in the school-yard, by the pout into which she framed her pretty lips, and the half-childish, half-coquettish tone in which she said :

'I am sure *I* don't care whether he is or not. I am tired of listening all this long time. I must have some one to talk to now.'

And for the first time in his life a secret hope found its way into John Grainger's heart.

Of course old David Graham had a share in that day's happiness.

Just as the loss of one sense quickens the power of every other, so did the inability to hold communion with those he loved by the mutual interchange of eye-to-eye sympathy intensify the keenness of his heart intercourse with them. There was nothing outward to distract the old man's thoughts, or prevent them concentrating themselves on his friends' participation in the day's treat. He had feared it would be no time of enjoyment to Johnnie ; and great was his astonishment when the young man returned, more eager in his account of the day's happiness than ever he remembered to have seen him before.

Not even to his dearest friend could John have confided

those secret hopes which were giving this altogether new tone to his voice. Yet David guessed the truth pretty nearly as correctly as though it had been told to him. But it did not make him as happy or as hopeful as evidently it had made John. For, from other sources, and especially from his somewhat gossiping visitor Hannah, he had heard reports which had made him feel that it by no means followed that because Minnie might not, after all, be 'taking up,' as Hannah termed it, with Richard Taylor, therefore she would be likely to lend a willing ear to John Grainger; so that during the next two days, when John was in singularly high spirits, old David did not respond. So little did he seem disposed to do so that, on the following Sunday, when, as usual, the old man and the young one held a little serious talk together while the widow was busy in her preparations for dinner, John took courage to ask his friend if he had anything on his mind. And when old David inquired why he put this question to him, he said:

'Because, sir, you have seemed so grave when I have been talking to you lately—ever since the picnic day.'

'Perhaps because you have seemed so very light-hearted, John,' the old man answered.

'Which you are always wanting me to be, sir,' John replied.

'And praying that you may be, Johnnie. But for all that—I need never ask you to forgive me if I speak plainly—I should be grieved to think you were fixing your heart on any earthly hope, John, which might never be realized.'

A quick flush, which David could not see, mounted to John's brow.

Old David knew something he did not know. He felt almost sure of it. But he made no answer. And the old man continued:

'I thought a deal about you, my lad, to-day, when the minister was reading to me those Collects at the end of

the Communion Service. You may take the book, Johnnie, and read them to me again. Make those Collects your prayers, my lad,' he said, as John ended the reading, 'and all will be well. No need to tell me, or any earthly friend, what makes your heart so lightsome and so bonnie. But be sure to tell it all to God, and then, no matter what changes and chances may be coming to you in this mortal life, if you only remain His servant, the Lord will dispose your ways aright, and make them, one and all, to lead towards the attainment of your everlasting salvation. Ask Him, my boy, to direct, sanctify, and govern both your heart and body in the ways of His laws, and in the works of His commandments. Seek for His protection both for body and soul. Get Him to *prevent* you—that is, go before you—Johnnie, in all your doings with His gracious favour, and to further you with His continual help; for depend upon it we cannot expect that any enterprise will prosper, or that the realization of any hope will bring us happiness, unless it is, as these words say, begun, continued, and ended in God. And God knows, John. He knows what is good for us. We do not. We are for ever ready to ask Him to incline His ears towards all sorts of supplications that we have it in our hearts to make, without considering whether or not they *are* faithfully asked, and according to His will, to the true relief of our necessity, and the setting forth of His glory. Ah, John, it's well for us, poor ignorant fools that we often are, it's well for us that we have to do with an Almighty God who is the fountain of all wisdom, and has compassion on our infirmities. He knows our ignorance in asking, and He knows what *are* our necessities, so let us just beseech Him to give us, for the worthiness of His Son, those good things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot, ask.'

CHAPTER XV.

THE QUEEN'S ACCESSION.

If that picnic to Bolton Priory had been a happy holiday to John Grainger, it had been a no less happy one to Ruth Heathcote, and with far better reason.

The rest of the party pleasantly disposed of for some time to come, she and Mr. Prescott started together in a little pony-carriage, hired from the Bolton Arms, for the village a few miles further, where they were to visit the new church, which was to serve as a model for another, similar in style, though smaller and less elaborate.

A lovely drive it was on that pleasant 20th of June, and yet lovelier it seemed to Ruth than to Mr. Prescott, for his duties led him often into fair country scenes, and amidst sweet country sights and sounds, but Ruth's enjoyment of such delights was rare. And, to-day, all things combined to make such enjoyment as keen as possible. The morning was soft and balmy; all Nature seemed to have put on its brightest spring garb to welcome these visitors from sombre and smoky regions; the sky shone clear and blue overhead, investing with warm light every feature of the landscape, whilst the drops of moisture from yesterday's rain that hung thick upon the boughs of the trees glistened in the present sunshine and gave an added softness to the scene.

Close beside the church they came to visit, some rich meadows spread themselves out, edged by old trees, which

banked a softly flowing river, in which some pretty cows were wading; whilst in the branches above them insects and birds seemed vying with each other in hymning forth their gratitude to God.

'How lovely Nature is, and how especially lovely it seems to us, who see so little of its beauties!' said Ruth, as she lingered in the pretty churchyard, the bells ringing meanwhile for morning service, in which they were just in time to join.

But if such was the impression made upon her by the beauties of nature, almost equally strong were the feelings excited within her by the beauties of art, as, the service over, she and Mr. Prescott remained in the church after the rest of the congregation had dispersed. An unusually good congregation it was for a week-day service, and a rich encouragement to the Vicar of the place, who at one time had found himself and his family almost the only worshippers, and had been used to say that if his people did not care to come there to pray and praise for themselves, there was all the more necessity for him to do so for them.

Again Ruth uttered the same exclamation, 'How lovely it is!' as they stood at the end of the nave, admiring the beauty of the building; 'it is quite a cathedral, Leonard.'

'Or, rather, it is like a cathedral in many respects, Ruthie, for it could not be a cathedral without——'

'The Bishop's chair, the "cathedra," which gives it its name,' interrupted Ruth; 'you see I have not forgotten the very first thing you taught me in church architecture.'

'Though you have allowed your little tongue to make two mistakes already, Ruthie, for I think you spoke just now of our being in the centre aisle.'

'Instead of in the nave. Yes, I know I did. But I had not forgotten, Leonard. I remember perfectly your explaining to me what the nave of a church was.'

'And why it was probably so called, Ruthie?'

'Yes; either from the Greek word "naos," a shrine; or, as others think, from the Latin word "navis," a ship, the great symbol of the Church in early ages.'

'Whilst aisle?'

'Comes from the French word "aile," or wing. I have never forgotten that since I read in a book mother gave me that it would be as incorrect to talk of a church having three aisles as of a bird having three wings. I recollect Helen, who always thought about everything, even when she was quite a little child, saying that before that she used to think it came from the French "allée," because the aisles led up and down the building.'

And then Ruth's attention returned to the beauty of the church, which was, indeed, planned like a small cathedral, in a cruciform shape, the nave and choir forming the length, the transepts running out to the right and forming the arms, whilst on either side of the nave rose high pillars, standing on square-moulded bases, from the beautiful carved capitals of which rose handsome arches, with deep, rich mouldings.

'It is far more beautiful than our church,' she said.

'It cost far more money,' said Mr. Prescott. 'This was built without regard to expense by the nobleman to whom the property belongs. We had to study economy a little more when building the Church of St. Simon and St. Jude.'

'And yet Mr. Abbott wished our church to be as beautiful as possible, and he is very wealthy,' replied Ruth, for a moment put out of conceit with her own lovely church by the decorated style of this one, with its large mullioned windows, the exquisite tracery of which described in luxuriant fulness the likeness of nature's loveliest foliage.

'But Mr. Abbott has many things to do with his money, Ruth, besides building the Church of St. Simon and St. Jude. The new dining-hall, which will be of such comfort to the workmen, will cost hundreds; and only remember how much he has spent in the workmen's institute and the

club and the schools. It needed truly a wealthy man to do all he has done. And I don't think you have any reason to complain of your church.'

'Complain of our church!' exclaimed Ruth; 'that is the last thing I should be tempted to do when I am so proud of it, and love it so much; when it is the church that you planned, and that my dear father helped to build!'

Mr. Prescott could not help smiling at the penitence expressed in the soft eyes raised to his, as though pleading for pardon. 'Well, Ruthie,' he said, 'you seemed disposed to draw a comparison between it and this one not altogether to the advantage of your own.'

'This is so wonderfully beautiful,' she said. And then she asked, 'Don't you think, Leonard, it helps one to pray and even to pay more attention to the reading of the Bible and to sermons, and to enter better into the words one sings, to be in a beautiful church? I do. I find it much easier to give my mind to the services in our own new church than I used to do in the Mission-room.'

'I doubt if your father finds much difference, Ruthie.'

'Oh, father is different,' she exclaimed; 'he is so good, so holy. But I know it is so with me, and I believe it is with most people.'

'Of course it is, Ruthie. Beautiful architecture is no doubt like music and poetry, a great aid to devotion. That is why we can never study too carefully how best to adorn God's House. You surely remember those lines of George Herbert:

> '"Doctrine and life, colours and light in one,
> When they combine and mingle,
> Bring a strong regard and awe."

And are not regard and awe the very feelings that should be called forth in a place of worship? This is one great object in making our churches as beautiful as possible—one object, though subordinate to others yet higher.'

'And these are——?' said Ruth, who, if she had not been supposed in former days to be gifted with an inquiring mind, certainly did not lack one now, when the inquiries had to be made of the friend who never seemed more kind and tender than when he, who—in Ruth's opinion—'knew all about everything,' sought to make something easy to be understood by the gentle maiden by his side, who, according to herself, 'knew nothing about anything.' 'And these are, Leonard——?'

'God's glory, and the teaching of His truth, Ruthie. What I especially value in this church is the remarkable way in which these two chief objects of a place of worship are set forth in every bit of symbolism we find here. Symbolism, you know, is the system of signs or outward images, and every outward image or sign which meets our eye in this church seems clearly to teach some really important truth of religion. I have been greatly struck by this ever since I have had to make a study of this building.'

And he led her from window to window, showing her how each represented some great Christian truth, and impressed on the mind, by pictorial symbol, some important fact or doctrine of the Bible.

'They are not as dark as many painted windows are,' said Ruth.

Mr. Prescott smiled.

'The object of windows being not to keep the light out, but to let it in.'

'To a certain extent, Leonard.'

'Quite sufficiently, Ruthie. Church windows are not needed to admit as much light as house windows, inasmuch as they are not used for the same purpose. So long as they are translucent——'

'Such a grand word,' interrupted Ruth.

'Well, Ruthie, so long as they allow the sun to shine clearly through them, the light they give is far better suited

to those feelings of "regard and awe" we were speaking of just now than the glare of ordinary windows would be.'

'"Storied windows, richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light."

It's my turn to quote poetry now,' said Ruth, as she repeated these words from 'Il Penseroso.'

'Exactly so, Ruthie,' he replied, with evident satisfaction.

Though he had been often heard to say that a very literary wife would not suit him so well as his friend Harold Moorhouse, it was a great delight to observe Ruth's increasing interest in all matters of literature and art—none the less so, doubtless, because he realized to what this quickened interest was to be attributed. As they left the church he said gravely:

'So that you see, Ruthie, what is really the only use of symbols—that the sight of them may recall our minds from earth's cares and interests to dwell on deeper and holier things. I have realized this often,' he added, 'when I have come into churches, not to worship, but to study, my head full of necessary calculations, my mind bent on external things, and better and holier thoughts have been suggested to me, even by a passing glance at a cross or a crown, a dragon or a palm. We can bring worldly and unworthy motives into the very purest work, Ruth.'

'Yes, of course,' she said, 'though I cannot imagine your doing so, Leonard.'

'Which shows, Ruthie, how much you have got to learn about me. This very church that I am going to build is a source of temptation to me.'

'Oh, Leonard, how?'

'What is to happen when it is completed, Ruth?'

'We are to be married. Father says I shall be old enough then.'

'And I shall be rich enough, Ruth. And we shall both be as happy as we can hope to be in this world.'

'But there is nothing wrong in all that, Leonard?'

'Nothing, Ruthie. Only evil is apt to creep into the best things, and we are only too ready to corrupt the purest of God's blessings by our sinfulness. So that, as I say, when I have been busy over my work here it has often been a help to be reminded by the mere sight of a carved dragon of the presence of Satan and of sin; whilst the symbol of a shell has spoken to me of the pilgrimage which this life is meant to be to all; and the cross has served to remind me of the suffering that everyone, even the happiest, must bear if they would be true followers of a crucified Saviour.'

'And the crown and the palm, Leonard?' Ruth asked, her mind turning, as was natural to her, to the brighter side of the subject.

'They have often cheered me with the hope, the blessed hope, that on the great day of the sealing of God's servants, you and I, Ruth, shall form part of that great multitude whom no man can number, who shall stand before the throne of the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and with palms in their hands, and shall cast their crowns before Him with a song of thanksgiving.'

As they drew near the Priory, and as Ruth realized that her time for quiet talking with Leonard was nearly over for that day, she said:

'How strange it seems that I should so much enjoy these talks with you. Helen used to be troubled sometimes, because she said I never cared for religious conversation. But I really think, Leonard, I like our grave talks even better than——'

'What people would call our love-making,' he answered with a smile; adding, 'Your remark makes me think of a sentence in a favourite author of mine.'

'George Macdonald?' she asked.

'George Macdonald,' he answered. 'I will find it for you when we get back this evening.'

John Preston came to meet the carriage as they drove up to the clearing in the wood where dinner was prepared.

'I hope we have not kept you waiting,' Mr. Prescott said. 'I know you have no time to lose if you are to have a good ramble, as we must be back punctually, on account of your lecture.'

'That wonderful lecture!' said Ruth, as Preston took off the pony-carriage, and she and Leonard joined the rest of the party.

A wonderful lecture it certainly seemed to those who, not many years ago, remembered that same man taking a leading part in exciting his fellow-workmen to discontent and opposition, and doing all that in him lay to raise higher and higher the dark wall of separation between the classes.

Now, standing up before hundreds of those who had listened to him then—his brow knit in thought, its many folds increased rather than lessened, but a clear light shining in his eyes instead of the troubled look that once dwelt in them, and a smile playing round his mouth which removed all its former harshness—John Preston was not ashamed to confess how mistaken his previous ideas had been, and to press upon the attention of his hearers those better principles, which he could promise them by experience would ensure success, where before they had found failure.

No longer an inveigher against sovereigns, bishops, and church establishments, he sought to convince them that it was the old paths that would be proved to be in truth the paths of pleasantness, and that it was in the old ways that they would find peace. He had known what it was to live in a state of wavering and excitement, tossed to and fro by various vain ideas, seeking constantly for rest and finding none; and he knew what it was to have found that rest in the bosom of the Church. Old David Graham himself could not have dwelt more strongly on the fact that the Church was a mother to all within her fold—feeding them, not with the exciting stimulants which produced a reaction of restless-

ness and dissatisfaction, but with that sincere milk of the Word, which instructed, strengthened, and satisfied.

All this did John Preston put before them, ending with the assurance, based on the truth of the Bible, that there was no higher wisdom, no surer policy for man than to reverence authority; and that those who, like himself, loved liberty above all else on earth, would find it nowhere so surely as in conscientious submission to law, and in seeking to carry out the will of God, who—being the 'Inventor of the great Machine of Society'—was the fittest person to make directions for its government.'

Beginning with that prayer for unity from the Accession Service, which 'is indeed one of the noblest in the Prayer-book,' the lecture concluded with the National Anthem, in the singing of which John Preston's voice sounded a little more loudly than would have pleased his son Charlie, but every note fell gratefully on the Vicar's ear.

But, interested as Mr. Prescott was in the lecture, it did not drive from his mind the remembrance of the morning conversation. And when, after supper, he and Ruth found themselves together in the Vicarage study, he took a volume from the book-shelves and read to her the words:

'If something of that sacred mystery, holy in the heart of the Father, which draws together the souls of man and woman, was at work between them, let those scoff at the mingling of love and religion who know nothing of either; but man or woman, who, loving woman or man, has never in that love lifted the heart to the Father, must take heed what they think of themselves. Love is a lifting, no less than a swelling of the heart. What changes this or that love must undergo ere it take its eternal place in the kingdom of heaven, through all its changes yet remaining in its one essential root the same, let the coming redemption reveal. The hope of all honest lovers will lead them to the vision. Only let them remember that love must dwell in the will as well as in the heart.'

CHAPTER XVI.

HOLY BAPTISM.

Two more years had passed, and during that time a pretty Vicarage had been built for Mr. Heathcote by the love of his parishioners, at Little Burton, in which pretty Vicarage Ruth was now staying with her husband, on the pleasantest of all the pleasant visits she had paid there. For those two years had she been the happiest of wives—so happy a wife that she had often been heard to declare, with her own enthusiastic warmth of expression, that it would be quite impossible to be happier than she was.

But to-day she herself gave an emphatic contradiction to this oft-repeated assertion, as, sitting in a low chair by the open window of the drawing-room, with her baby on her lap, she looked up at her husband and declared that she had never been so happy in all her life—that even she, in whose nature happiness was such a predominant element, could not have thought that such joy could be felt on earth.

'It is such a perfect day,' she said; 'even the sun and the wind seem to sympathize with us. We have not had such bright sunshine before this spring, and this soft southerly breeze is not strong enough even to fan my baby's cheek. It is all simply perfect.'

'Even though Harold cannot be here as you so much wished, Ruthie?'

'Yes,' she said; 'that is a disappointment, certainly. I suppose there must always be a little bit of disappointment in the most perfect things. I do wish Harold could have found some one to do his duty, and could have come with Helen. But I am so glad she consented to come without him; and I am glad, too, that she did not wish the baptism to be put off.'

'I knew she would agree with me,' said Mr. Prescott. 'You heard what she said about it. Both their children have been baptized on Sunday.'

'Yes, I know,' said Ruth; 'but, then, it is easy for them to arrange that, and, of course, Harold, as a clergyman, is obliged to be very particular about everything.'

Mr. Prescott smiled.

Ruth caught the meaning of the smile, and added:

'I know you don't agree with me about that either.'

'In thinking that clergymen are more bound than others to set a good example? Yes, I do, Ruthie, though perhaps not to such an extent as you do. The obligation lies on every servant to obey his master's orders, though greater responsibility may devolve upon some than upon others. But I should have been very sorry for my little son to have been baptized on any other day than Sunday, unless there had been some urgent necessity for it. It is a wise arrangement of our Church that baptisms should be as public as possible, that all may see the new member admitted into the holy fellowship, as well as be reminded of the obligations they have themselves entered into, and the blessings and privileges they have received. We are only too ready to forget these things, Ruthie.'

'Well, there are likely to be a good many witnesses of our boy's admission into the Church,' said Ruth. 'Such a day as this will bring out all the old people and the invalids who have been waiting for warm weather.' And then she added, with a sigh: 'If it could only have brought out my dear

Mrs. Abbott! Not that this is a disappointment, for, of course, I never expected her to be with us.'

'Except in heart, Ruth. Perhaps she will be all the more present in spirit from being absent in body. There will be nothing to distract her thoughts from the solemnity of the service, as she joins her prayers to ours for her little god-child. But I do indeed wish she could be with us. I am not at all partial to sponsors standing surety for children by proxy. But, of course, there are exceptions, and this certainly is one. She will be well represented by your mother.'

'And also by her lovely flowers, Leonard. I told her this morning that she must have intended them as symbols of the graces that she desired for her godson. They are all white, and white is the emblem of purity, and each particular flower seemed to represent some lovely grace. I never saw the font look so beautiful.'

'John Preston made the same remark to me just now. He said there were lots of folk peeping into the church to see it, and one woman remarked that it was a good thing it stood so close to the door, so that they could get a good sight of it, on which John told her—for he knew her children to be unbaptized—that it would be a better thing still if its position there could remind people that Baptism was the entrance, ordained by Christ Himself, by which one was admitted into the Church.'

'So like John,' said Ruth; 'he always finds an opportunity of saying something to the point.'

And then, with a glance at the clock, she broke off what was to her always the great delight of her life—a Sunday talk with her husband—and carried her baby to be robed in the pure white robe which might have served as another symbol of the inward grace which by God's Holy Spirit would accompany the outward sign in the Holy Sacrament to which he was about to be admitted.

There was indeed a goodly congregation in the Church of St. Simon and St. Jude that morning. The bright sunshine, as Ruth had predicted, brought many to church, amongst them old David Graham. His rheumatism had kept him at home for long weeks, but he managed to come this morning, drawn by Johnnie Grainger in the invalid-chair which had once been Mrs. Abbott's, which indeed was hers now, but which she herself would never use again. The only drawback to David's thankfulness in being able to get to church this morning was his fear lest 'folk should think he had only come because "Miss Ruthie's" boy was about to be baptized.'

'It does not need that to lead me to use my best efforts to get to this holy place, the Lord knows!' he said to Mrs. Grainger. 'Not but what I am more than thankful to be allowed to join my old voice with the rest of the congregation in praying for the dear lamb who has had a place in my prayers ever since I heard the good news of his birth. But it does not need this to bring old David Graham to the church he loves so well.'

But if David Graham did not come to church that morning because the minister's grandchild was to be baptized—the first of his grandchildren who had ever been presented at that font—many others did. 'Miss Ruth' had been the darling of the whole district—perhaps not so intensely loved by any as her elder sister Helen had been by David and a very few others—but generally loved and admired by all, and especially by the old people and the little children. There had never been anyone like Miss Ruth for showing kindness to everybody and sympathizing in everything, whether it were joy or sorrow. Her heart and her hand were always ready to open to everyone. When she married and went away, all had mourned her loss. When she came to see them, all welcomed her back. And now that her child had been born in the new Vicarage, built for her

father—the first child born in it—a general sympathy was felt throughout the district. More work was done on the Saturday previous to her baby's baptism than was usually done on other Saturdays, even by the best housekeepers. Children were put to bed earlier, and clothes got ready for the Sunday, and dinners prepared, that mothers and elder sisters might not only get the children off to Sunday-school and church, but might, at least on this morning, come themselves. Hundreds of eyes were fixed on Mr. Heathcote as he took his little grandson in his arms, and baptized him in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

One pair of eyes, though close to the minister at the time, were not lifted towards him, but over their sightless balls two withered hands were tightly pressed, whilst with the inward eye of faith, rendered, he had so often said, all the keener by the loss of outward vision, old David prayed perhaps the most fervent of all the fervent prayers that were offered in that church that morning for the little newly-made soldier and servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. Life was before many of those most interested in the service. It was closing fast for old David. Its interests, pleasures, pursuits were nothing to him. But as prayer after prayer went up for this little child, his heart went up earnestly to God in each. For *these* were the things needed. These were the realities of life. As they came into the church, they had met 'the baptism,' as Mrs. Grainger had called it. And, of course, young Mrs. Prescott had stopped and insisted that they should see the baby.

'He was a beauty,' Mrs. Grainger declared, 'as lovely as even a baby of Miss Ruth's might be expected to be. A little angel, and so exquisitely dressed! Such a lovely robe! It was Mrs. Abbott's gift? Well, it looked like it, and was worthy both of her and of the sweet baby himself.'

All this and a good deal more of the same kind old David heard, sitting sightless in his chair, and in his mind he sup-

plied a running commentary to it—a commentary which provided subject for his prayers even before the service commenced.

'It was all quite true,' he said to himself. 'Though he could not see the child's beauty, being Miss Ruth's baby, he was fully able to believe in it; and as for his outward clothing for that important event in his life, no doubt, being provided by such a rich and generous godmother as Mrs. Abbott, it was of the best and loveliest. But, for all that he had such a sweet and lovely lady for his mother, and such a noble gentleman as Mr. Prescott for his father, the child, like other children, was conceived and born in sin. No natural inheritance of earthly beauty, no amount of hereditary graces of person or of mind, could by any possibility give him that thing which by nature none could have—the regeneration of the Holy Ghost, the new birth of Water and the Spirit. The love and care and reverence of earthly parents and godparents might bring him to this flower-bedecked font sweet and pure and exquisitely robed, so far as his much-loved little body was concerned. But it needed a power higher than theirs, and a love even greater and more wonderful, to effect that mystical washing away of sin which could alone deliver him from God's wrath, and provide for him that seamless, spotless robe of Christ's righteousness, clothed in which he could alone be received into the ark of Christ's Church.

No part of the service was lost on David. To him every word in it was important. Every act had its meaning. He was far too infirm now to stand for any length of time, but he laid hold of his stick and rose to hear the Gospel read. The words fell on his ears with all the greater thankfulness because only the day before he had been urging them upon one of his many visitors—for neighbours were very friendly in coming in to see 'blind Mr. Graham'—as the great argument in favour of Infant Baptism. This

visitor, a poorly-instructed but religiously minded workman in one of the factories, would have it that there was no direct command in Holy Scripture for bringing infants to baptism, but had gone away a good deal shaken in his opinions by David's assurances that the indirect proofs were quite direct enough for any earnest Christian to take heed to follow them. Was it not our Lord's command that all nations should be baptized, and did not infants form the largest portion of every nation? Were not the Jewish children by God's command admitted as infants into all the covenant blessings of God's chosen people, and was not that ordinance analogous to baptism, and a type of it? These Scripture proofs of the correctness of Infant Baptism had been precious to old David long before the minister had led him to study Church history, and his belief had been confirmed by the knowledge that the practice of Infant Baptism had existed from the time of the Apostles, and that, as early as the second century after Christ, Christians were to be found who had been in the Church from infancy, and must have been baptized as infants by the successors of the Apostles themselves. Familiar as these things were to old David, he had rarely need to dwell on them for his own comfort; but having been urging them earnestly on the attention of another only the evening before, the words of St. Mark in that day's Gospel came home to his mind with fresh power. He could feel something of our Lord's divine displeasure with those who would have forbidden the little children to be brought unto Him. He fancied he could see the tender gesture and deed by which the gracious Saviour declared His own good-will toward them, as He embraced them in His arms, aid His hands upon them, and blessed them, blaming those who would have kept them from Him, and exhorting all to follow their innocency.

Feeling this in the depth of his heart, David Graham

was so much in earnest in beseeching God, for the sake of His own infinite mercies, to look mercifully upon this child, and wash him and sanctify him with the Holy Ghost, that the tears actually forced themselves through the old man's sightless eyes and dropped upon his withered hands.

They were noticed only by Helen, who, faithful to her friendship for the old pensioner, had secured a place for him close by herself. She was touched to the heart by the sight, and told him so that afternoon when, as on every Sunday that she ever spent in her old home, she came to pass an hour with him.

'I wish you could have been at the baptism of one of my children, David,' she said. 'I felt jealous of Mrs. Prescott this morning.'

'No need to be, Miss Helen,' he said, for the old man often declared himself too old to think of the new names, and begged to be allowed without offence to use the old ones. 'Miss Ruth's boy is dear to me, as child of hers and grandchild of the minister's must be and ought to be. But no children will ever be to me what yours are. I feel it every time I lay my old hands on their young heads, with a longing in my heart that I could have just one look at their sweet faces—a longing which I ask the Lord to forgive, for since it isn't His good will to give it, it can't be good for me to have it. And as to being at their baptisms, why, I *have* been at them. Ask the minister if I have not. It would have taken a good deal to keep old David Graham off his knees when others were being called upon to petition God the Father, through our Lord Jesus Christ, of His bounteous mercy to give unto a child of yours these heavenly blessings which are granted in baptism. Why, Miss Helen, I never hear the Baptismal Service read—and that is every Sunday—but I think of your lambs, Master Harold and Miss Winifred. I think they've got the love in my old heart which would have gone to my own bairns' little ones if they

had lived to be happy wives and mothers. You will send them to see me this evening, won't you? Mrs. Grainger has been telling me how attentive they were all through the service—just as I should have expected children of yours to be.'

'As you might expect children of their father's to be, David, you should say. If they are more reverent in church than other children—and they certainly are—it is all due to him. He is always so resolved that they shall be, especially during the Baptismal Service—the most important of all, he says, for children to understand. I wish you could see how well they *do* understand it. Get Harold to talk to you about it this afternoon. His mind is full of his little cousin's baptism, so it will be easy to do so, and I am sure you will be surprised to see how much he knows about it. All through his father's teaching,' she added, as though to check the natural pride which she felt in speaking of her boy's singular intelligence and advancement.

CHAPTER XVII.

HOLY BAPTISM.

THERE was no fear of David Graham's forgetting his dear 'Miss Helen's' request.

No sooner were the two children established, one on each side of him, for their usual Sunday afternoon talk, than he drew the conversation to the subject of their little cousin's baptism, asking them many questions, merely for the pleasure of hearing from their lips, in their own simple language, what he already knew so well.

It was some time, however, before he could draw from Harold all he wanted the boy to tell him, for Winifred, as usual, was anxious to talk of everything she had heard and seen since her last visit to her old friend, having an idea—though a very mistaken one—that David's blindness must make him keenly alive to every bit of information that could be given to him, and very grateful to anyone who brought it. She would have told him first the whole story of the illness and death of her mother's dear little brother Godfrey, after whom Aunt Ruthie had that day named her firstborn; but finding that David was better acquainted with this story than she was herself, she thought of every detail connected with the morning's event which the old man's blindness must have prevented his seeing.

'There was one little baby who did not have the water thrown over him, in the same way as our baby had.'

'Yes, I know, missie; that is Mrs. Patten's baby, who lives next door but one to me. That was because it is so weakly. The mother did not want to have him brought to church at all. She wanted the minister to half baptize him, as she called it, at home, only he would not.'

'That's like father,' said Harold; 'he says it's very wrong to baptize babies at home unless they are really dying. But father says, Mr. Graham, it's silly to talk about "half baptizing." They say that in our village, and he always says there's no such thing.'

'Nor is there, Master Harold; of course, it's only an ignorant way of speaking.'

'I wouldn't like to be baptized at home,' said Winifred decidedly. 'It would not seem like being really baptized.'

'But it would be, missie—it would be just the same blessing; only there must be a real necessity for such a sacred service being performed in private, and not, as is expressly commanded, in the sight of God's assembled congregation. I've known folks here send for the minister to come and baptize their children just because they were too lazy to take them to church, or, maybe, had not clothes to their mind to carry them in.'

'Was that why Mrs. Patten did not wish to bring her baby, Mr. Graham?'

'No, miss, it was not. Mrs. Patten's a good woman, and likes to do what is right; but her baby is a poor weakly little thing, and she was mighty afraid of its getting a chill.'

'I hope it won't,' said Winifred, so gravely that the old man could not restrain a smile. 'It would be dreadful for grandpapa if it did, as he made her bring it to church.'

'I don't think you need be afraid, missie. But even if it did, it would not be the minister's fault. It would be with that as it is with other things. We can but do our duty, and leave the rest to God. But if it had been baptized at home, Miss Winifred,' he added, 'it would have been

brought to church afterwards, when it was strong enough, that it might be openly received into Christ's Church, and its sponsors answer publicly for it.'

'Yes; I know, Mr. Graham. My old nurse's baby was baptized like that three months ago, and it was only brought to church the Sunday before we came here. It was so near dying when it was born that they baptized it before father could get there. He had gone a long way off to see a sick man, and the doctor thought it could not live till he came back. Father said they did quite right.'

'Of course they did, missie. Anyone may baptize in a case like that, and the baptism is real and true, if they attend to the two necessary points—the use of water and the words, "In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost." There must be water; Master Harold knows that, for he knows the meaning of the word "baptize," which I never did till the minister told me.'

'It comes from a Greek word meaning "to dip or bathe,"' said Harold.

'And one can't do that without water—can one?' continued the old man. 'It is not often, however, Miss Winnie, that a baby so near death as that one must have been lives.'

'Nurse's baby did, Mr. Graham; and I was so sorry when it came to church that they had been obliged to baptize it, for it was called after me—Winifred Agnes—and I wanted so much to have heard my name given out in church.'

'That was very silly of her, wasn't it, David?' interrupted Harold.

A quick shadow gathered over Winifred's sunny face. To be considered silly by her wiser brother was at present the chief trouble of her young life, and long habit entirely failed to make her feel it one bit the less.

The cloud was dispelled, however, when old David

whom even Harold considered to be the very wisest of wise old men, said :

'Well, Master Harold, I don't think it was. We are all fond of hearing our own name ; and I think we ought to be, since it's our Christian name, given to us in the most sacred moment of our lives, when God's own ordained priest takes us into his arms, and, signing us with the sign of the Cross, in token of our high calling as His soldier and servant, receives us publicly in the congregation of His flock. I like myself to hear a Christian name given out loud and clear. It seems a consecration of the child individually, as set apart to fight manfully under Christ's banner against sin, the world, and the devil. For my part, I have always liked to hear the naming of the child, even before your dear grandpapa told me that this custom had been in our Church ever since the earliest times.'

'Mother says you like old things and old customs very much, Mr. Graham,' said Harold.

'Very much indeed, Master Harold. It makes a thing very precious to know it has borne the wear and tear and rough treatment of time, and that our grandfathers and their grandfathers practised it before us. As to this thing we are speaking of—the giving of the name in Baptism—I dare say you know what an old custom it has been to make the naming of a child a religious ceremony, a part of its being received into God's family.'

'Of course I do, Mr. Graham. In the time of the Jews they were named when they were circumcised.'

'Did the Jews sprinkle them with water, and sign them with the sign of the Cross?' asked Winifred.

Again the somewhat scornful smile curled Harold's short upper lip, and brought his pearly white teeth into still greater prominence ; but before Winifred's sensitive little soul could again be made sore by any word of her beloved brother, old David had given the boy a reproof which went

home to his conscience by the quiet way in which he said, as though the little maid had been guilty of no display of ignorance whatever :

'No, no, little missie, the Cross was not the symbol or sign of the Jewish faith as it is of ours. We don't find Old Testament saints using that blessed symbol, as we do. But we do find that it was used by Christians in very early days—so early that there is great reason for supposing that it was used by the Apostles themselves.'

An expression of deep thought came into Harold's eyes, and Winifred, who knew every look of her brother's face, felt quite sure that he was turning over some question in his mind which would no doubt be altogether beyond her.

He did not speak, however, for some time, and Winifred was beginning to grow weary of the silence, and to wish that she could think of something to say herself which would not be altogether irrelevant to the seriousness of the conversation, when the boy, who, notwithstanding his occasional impatience with his sister's thoughtlessness, was as modest as he was intelligent, overcame his reluctance to appear better informed than old Mr. Graham, and said :

'But the Jews did know about the Cross, Mr. Graham—and about Jesus. Abraham rejoiced to see His day.'

Old David's face lighted up with satisfaction. It was such happiness to him to hear the boy—Miss Helen's boy—talk in this way—almost as great happiness, indeed, as if he had been 'one of his own bairns' laddies.'

Harold saw his satisfaction in his face. It removed all fear from his mind, in which veneration was quite as strongly implanted as the love of knowledge, lest he ought not to have made his last remark, and he added :

'Father often makes us learn about the types of Baptism in the Old Testament.'

'There are plenty of them, are there not, Master Harold?'

'Yes, indeed. Winifred knows several — don't you, Winnie?'

But Winifred's mind was wandering, and the question had to be put to her in a simpler form before she answered:

'The ark was like Baptism—and the Red Sea.'

'The Red Sea most of all, father says, Mr. Graham,' added Harold.

'Most of all, Master Harold; for the people came into it out of Egypt. And we know what Egypt is a type of.'

'Sin,' said Harold.

'And bondage, Master Harold; and in the sea of Christ's Blood both are washed away. Pharaoh and his great army —you know whom they represent?'

'The world, the flesh, and the devil, Mr. Graham.'

'The three great spiritual enemies which we promise to renounce in Baptism. They follow after Christ's redeemed people, but can't overcome them. The Christian goes on his way, freed from their power, so long as he trusts to—what had the ransomed Israelites to guide them? I am sure Miss Winifred can tell me that.'

'The pillar of cloud and fire,' said Winifred.

'Yes, missie—that was it. They had them, as every baptized Christian has the guidance of God's presence, to lead them safely all along the wilderness way, from the very beginning of the right road until they came to the Promised Land—to the spiritual Canaan, which is heaven. Yes, indeed, the passage of the Red Sea is a clear and comforting type of Baptism. But you can tell me of others, Master Harold?'

'Oh yes, Mr. Graham. Naaman was cleansed of his leprosy by washing in the waters of Jordan.'

'The only waters, Master Harold, that could cleanse that polluted Syrian from his stains, just as the Blood of the Lord Jesus can alone wash away the sinner's guilt. But we

read of some one else, before Naaman's time, who was saved by water.'

'Moses,' said Harold. 'He was drawn out of the river, and saved from being destroyed by the wicked King Pharaoh.'

'And brought up by his mother,' replied David, 'and taught and trained how to live in the king's palace. We have got a mother to take care of us. I have got one, though I am such an old man, and my mother was laid to her rest in the churchyard forty years a-gone.'

'You mean the Church,' said Harold. 'Father often calls her our Mother Church, and we have got a book at home by that name; mother reads to us bits of it sometimes.'

'Yes, Master Harold, that's just who I do mean. And a good mother she has been to me, as she has been to thousands of her children before me, and will be to thousands after me—to all who yield to her tender care and faithful teaching, and let themselves be guided by her till they come into the Palace of the Great King, for which she prepares and educates them. But here's Hannah to fetch you young people home. We can't talk any more now, but you'll come again next Sunday, and we will see how many more types we can find of Holy Baptism in the Bible.'

The children ran gaily off, and the subject passed from their minds.

But it remained in old David's, as he sat on in the twilight, waiting until Mrs. Grainger and her son should come in from evening service.

A few words of thankfulness went up from his heart as he thought of the privilege it was to these children to be thus early taught to understand the Old Testament and explain it by the New, and to be led by both to that Holy Saviour, the efficacy of whose precious Blood has been, from the first days of Adam's fall, the only ground of hope for the sinner,

penitent for past sin and yearning not only for pardon and peace, but for sanctification and service. Back to the very beginning of the world, even before the day of man's transgression and God's direct promise of salvation, old David had learned to trace the system of redemption, in the moving of the Spirit of God upon the face of the waters, giving rise to light and to life.

Yes, he thought, the Holy Scriptures are full of types of this heaven-ordained institution of Baptism from the very first day of man's creation. In the flood and the ark; in the history of Moses, and the passage of the Red Sea; in the Laver in which every priest had to wash before he could enter into the Tabernacle of God; in every detail concerning the cleansing of the leper; in the bird slain in water; in the cedar which told of the Cross, and the scarlet which spoke of the precious Blood, and the hyssop which typified the soul's sanctification; in the seven sprinklings, which represented the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit; in all these things he read the types of Holy Baptism as clearly as in those more manifest types with which the children were so well acquainted. Living as he had done for years amidst an ungodly and uneducated yet very intelligent people in a crowded manufacturing district, where many of those with whom he came into daily contact were still unbaptized, the old man was constantly seeking to impress upon the minds of others the necessity of Christian Baptism, and the sad condition of those who, in error and unbelief, cut themselves off from its blessed privileges.

'It is not a matter of choice,' he had urged, only a few days before, to a kind-hearted workman, who had declared that he had never been baptized himself, and saw no reason why his children should be. 'You believe in God, don't you?'

'Yes,' Andrew Lovell answered, 'I believe in God.'

'Then it is God's own word, Andrew,' the old man said,

'that "Except a man be born *of water* and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." It is the Lord's own ordinance of salvation, and He Himself submitted to it, and was baptized of John the Baptist. Read your Bible, and you will see its necessity. God worked a miracle to convert St. Paul, and he arose from his blindness and was baptized. There is but one way for all, one teaching for all—for Cornelius and his Gentile band, for the Samaritans who listened to Philip's preaching, for the eunuch of great authority who came from Ethiopia in his chariot, for Lydia of Thyatira, the seller of purple, and for the gaoler of Philippi.'

And it is a fact that Andrew Lovell, who believed David Graham to be like no one else for patience, and goodness, and learning, was so impressed by the old man's earnestness that he thought he would study the subject for himself more closely than he had done before, and the result of his studies we shall see later.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOLY BAPTISM.

'It troubles me very much, Ruthie, that you cannot see the matter in the same light that I do—that we do indeed; for your father quite agrees with me.'

'And it troubles me, too, mother. It makes me quite unhappy. It takes away the pleasure of what would otherwise be such a delightful plan.'

And the troubled expression of Ruth Prescott's usually bright face bore testimony to the sincerity of her regret.

It was very seldom—indeed, it was the first time that any difference of opinion concerning any matter of importance had arisen between Mrs. Heathcote and her daughter since Ruth had first passed from her stepmother's authority to that of her husband.

Often since that day had Ruth come to her mother for the advice or instruction which only her womanly instinct or experience could supply. Never, until now, had that advice been given without its finding an echo within Ruth's own heart which had led her at once to follow it.

But on this one subject, when the advice had not been asked, but had been given unsolicited, but very earnestly, Ruth had not found it in her heart to be guided by it.

There was a few minutes' silence between them, Mrs. Heathcote meanwhile going on quietly with her work, some soft material which her skilful fingers were making

into a robe for another newly-expected grandchild, whilst young Mrs. Prescott sat with her eyes fixed on the stand of blossoming flowers in the open window, without, however, seeing any of them.

She was the first to speak again.

'Leonard has no objection, mother. That is my comfort. I should not think of it if he had.'

'No, dear, I am sure you would not,' replied Mrs. Heathcote.

'And Leonard is so wise and calm, and has such good judgment always.'

Mrs. Heathcote did not answer until Ruth changed her assertion into an interrogation. Then her mother replied with a smile:

'I don't know that I should say "always," Ruth; certainly, generally. Perhaps I might say "always," excepting when his little wife and her dearest wishes are concerned.'

'You always say that Leonard spoils me, mother.'

'Which makes it of still greater consequence, Ruthie, that you should not spoil yourself.'

'But I am not eager for this for my own sake, mother. It is for Minnie's—poor little Minnie. She has had so much trouble. It seems as if everything failed her, one after another. No sooner is she happily settled in a good home than she is uprooted again from it. She was so contented at her aunt's before Richard came back, leading such a quiet, useful, happy life. Now all that has been upset. She can't possibly remain there with Richard persecuting her to marry him whenever she is at home, and watching her movements and dogging her footsteps whenever she goes out.'

'No,' said Mrs. Heathcote; 'we are all perfectly agreed on that point.'

'And you think, yourself, that she is not suited to be a governess?'

'By her talents and her accomplishments, of course she would be, but not by her character. She is far too impulsive and uncontrolled herself to exercise any real control over others.'

'And far too pretty besides,' said Ruth. 'Leonard says he should be very sorry to see such a lovely girl as she is go out unprotected into the world, and, however careful we might be in selecting a situation for her, we cannot be sure of securing the protection she needs. She will have it with me, mother.'

'And she would have it with me, Ruthie,' said Mrs. Heathcote. 'I feel quite as strongly as you can do the need in which Minnie Davis stands of constant protection. For she is not only very pretty, Ruth, but she is fully aware of her own beauty, and values it at a high rate. Minnie is very vain.'

'Yes,' said Ruth, rather reluctantly; 'she is vain, I know, though people do not think so.'

'Because she is too refined to allow it to be perceived, and has too much common sense besides. But anyone who knows her well must be aware that vanity, the desire of admiration, and a secret love of flattery, are very strong ingredients in her character. And she is also very self-willed, Ruth, though her extreme good-nature, and her desire to please, and to make herself loved, prevent her strong will making itself very manifest. But it exists all the same, and this is one reason why I feel so very anxious about her.' And then she added: 'But there is no use in discussing the matter now that it is finally settled. We won't go over all the pros and cons of the arrangement again. We will only trust that it may be for the happiness —the true happiness of all concerned.'

'Only I can't be quite happy about it, mother, while you are not.'

'That can't be helped either, Ruthie. You would not

wish me to express a satisfaction which I did not really feel?'

'No, of course not, mother; but I hope you very soon will, when you see——'

But the prophecy of what Mrs. Heathcote was to see remained untold at this moment, its utterance being interrupted by the entrance of Mr. Heathcote and Mr. Prescott.

With a half-penitent, half-laughing glance at the clock, Ruth expressed her regret at not being ready, according to promise, and hurried away to put on her walking things, saying as she did so that 'Mother and she had been having another talk.'

'Not on the subject of Minnie's coming to live with us, I hope,' said Mr. Prescott.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Heathcote. 'Ruth persisted in returning to it, though, as I tell her, it is useless and foolish to do so now that it is finally settled.'

'I must tell her so yet more strongly,' he replied, with just a shade of annoyance in his voice. 'She must not be allowed to worry herself any more about it. She is not strong, and she thinks over things until she loses her sleep, and looks quite fagged and worn out next day. She has set her heart on Minnie's living with us since she can no longer remain with her aunt, and now that it has been arranged for her to do so, it is only troubling herself uselessly to think any more of the objections that have been urged against the plan. And I think there will be many advantages in it for Ruth herself, as well as for the girl. The heavy work that my increasing business gives me to do obliges me to leave her a great deal more alone than I like. She does not care much for books, unless when reading them with me, and she has not the opportunity for outdoor interests that she had at home. There are few pursuits to occupy her out of her own house, and I think she misses the many interests of her former life now that she is so

much alone. I believe this plan will really be very good for her.'

And his wife appearing at that moment in her hat and jacket, he went off with her to make some necessary arrangements for Minnie Davis' future residence in their home.

'Was there ever such an indulgent husband!' exclaimed Mrs. Heathcote, as she watched the young couple taking their way together down the road, Ruth's face bright again with the thought of how best she could make her *protégée* comfortable and happy in her home, which was now to become Minnie's also.

'Over-indulgent, I fear,' replied Mr. Heathcote; 'he is going the way to spoil her.'

'And yet I should not have thought he was a man to spoil anyone, even those he loved best. He does not spoil Godfrey in the least.'

'Everyone has his weak point,' replied Mr. Heathcote, 'and I am afraid Ruth is his. He is foolishly afraid of distressing her in any way. It seems to be positive pain and grief to him to contradict her smallest wish. It is a great pity.'

'I fancy past circumstances have had something to do with it,' said Mrs. Heathcote.

'No doubt they have,' he replied. 'His heart was so bent upon winning her when he was not sure of his success, when he was very doubtful, indeed, whether he ever should succeed, that it has become a habit with him to consult her every thought, and sacrifice every wish of his own to hers.'

'I wonder what he really feels about this plan of Minnie's living with them?' continued Mrs. Heathcote.

'He tells me he is perfectly satisfied, and he would not say so unless he were.'

'I wish I were,' said Mrs. Heathcote; 'but my feeling

about this is very strong. However, I must not allow myself to be worried by what is inevitable.'

And she repeated the words which had become a family proverb, so often had the children been taught to say them :

> 'To every evil under the sun
> There is a remedy, or there's none.
> If there is one, try to find it ;
> If there isn't, never mind it.'

Meanwhile, the unconscious subject of all this difference of opinion was busy in her own little room in her aunt's well-ordered house on the hill, taking down from the walls and shelves the various pictures and books that were her own peculiar property. Apparently her anticipated change of residence was not altogether a matter of happiness, for her face was pale and bore signs of very recent tears.

There were no signs of tears on Mrs. Job Taylor's face, but it was many shades paler than Minnie's when, a few minutes afterwards, she came into the room, and, looking round it, sat down on a chair without speaking a word.

'Please, auntie, do not stay here,' said Minnie pleadingly. 'It's hard enough to have to do this work at all, but I can't do it with you looking on.'

'And why do it at all ?' exclaimed Mrs. Taylor. 'That's the question I came to ask—for the last time, Minnie. Why not be a sensible girl, as well as an unselfish one, and listen to Richard ? You're not likely ever to find anyone again to love you as he does.'

A sign of impatience passed over Minnie's face. She had heard the same words so often before. They made her feel all the more anxious to be gone, in spite of her real sorrow at leaving. Her heart sank with the anticipation of hearing them all over again. But the expression of her face changed when her aunt went on to say :

'I suppose, then, I must begin to pack also. Richard declares he won't stop here a day after you are gone ; and

where he goes I shall go too. If he won't let me live with him, I will live near him.'

'Oh, auntie!' exclaimed Minnie, 'and break up your pretty home!'

'You've broken it up for me, Minnie, by your cruelty to Dick. If you would only listen to his love, you'd soon come to love him in return. But he shall have his mother's love wherever he goes, or whatever becomes of him. And God only knows what will become of him. He says he has lived for you all the while he has been away. He has worked for you, he has earned a high character, that he might be in a position to win you for his wife. And now he does not care where he goes, or what he does. Only he won't stop here, and neither will I.'

By this time Minnie was crying bitterly, but she said nothing; and Mrs. Taylor, seeing that she could not get a word out of her, left her to herself.

Not to resume her packing, however. Throwing open the window, she stood for some little time looking out into the road, though without seeing anything that was passing in it, until her attention was arrested by the sight of Mrs. Prescott, evidently coming towards the house.

Some severe words that had escaped her aunt that morning at breakfast concerning this lady made Minnie unwilling that she should come to the house just at this moment, and, quickly putting on her hat, she went out to meet her, and together they went to the Vicarage.

There, in the room which had witnessed so many of their conversations together—the room which for a short time had been Ruth's bedroom, and had been kept unoccupied ever since, to be used by her as a little sanctum during her frequent visits to her old home—they held a long talk together.

'And you do not respect him either?' Ruth said, as it drew to a close.

'Respect him!' Minnie replied. 'You know I don't. I

despise him. I never have believed in his religion. It has never seemed to me anything but a pretence, put on for a purpose. And now his own mother's words prove it to be so, in spite of the belief she professes to have in him.'

And Minnie repeated to Ruth the conversation which had passed between Mrs. Job Taylor and herself that morning, which conversation Ruth, in her turn, repeated that same evening to her father, as she walked home with him from the young women's Bible-class, where she had been taking her mother's place at the harmonium. On such occasions Ruth felt herself a girl once more, and talked as freely to her father of her old pupils as if she had never known any other pursuits or interests than those which had been so dear to her in her former home.

The subject at this moment being Minnie Davis and the fresh trouble that had come upon her, she talked with very great interest, and, unconsciously perhaps to herself, with yet more freedom than she would have done to her husband, from whom she would have received less sympathy.

'Leonard thinks me prejudiced against Richard Taylor,' said Ruth. 'I have often been tempted to tell him the story of his stealing the cheque.'

'And you never have, Ruthie? I thought you told Leonard everything.'

'So I do, father, so I can't help doing. It is the hardest thing in the world for me to keep anything from him, even things he won't let me tell him; for he will never allow me to repeat a word against anyone, unless it is something which it is right for him to know. He says it would only be giving me an excuse for evil-speaking to allow me to tell him things which I ought not to tell others.'

'And so you have never mentioned Taylor's past history to him, Ruth?'

'Not only for that reason, father. I can't bear Richard Taylor. He is about the only person in the world for whom

I feel what one calls a positive antipathy, and so I have felt as if I should be indulging my personal dislike for him in prejudicing Leonard against him. And, besides,' she added, 'would it not be rather like proving myself right and convincing Leonard that he was wrong?'

Mr. Heathcote smiled, a happy smile. His little Ruth was the same tender-hearted, single-minded creature that she had been in the days of her childhood.

'Well,' he said, 'I am sorry for the young fellow; for, if his high profession of religion is not sincere, his love for Minnie most certainly is.'

'You don't think his religion sincere, then?' Ruth inquired eagerly. 'I don't ask this from a wrong motive, father, only because I have been so anxious about Minnie—lest she should be persuaded by her aunt's entreaties, added to Richard's, to listen to him.'

'I should not think there was the slightest fear of that, Ruth, from all I know of Minnie, though, of course, you know her better than I do.'

'You say "fear," father. Then you do not think Richard Taylor would be any help to Minnie? I was thinking of her all the time that you were talking this evening about the help or the hindrance which marriage must of necessity be to all in helping or hindering them to keep their baptismal vow. You had Eunice Best in your mind, had you not?'

'Yes, Ruth; there can be no doubt about the hindrance young Marshall will be to her if she persists in marrying him against her father's wishes.'

'I had Minnie in my mind, father. I thought of her all the time. She really is very weak, though she is so self-willed.'

'Perhaps we might say, Ruthie, she is very weak because she is so "self-willed."

'And Richard Taylor would be no help to her. You don't think him a good man, do you, father?'

'It is not for me to judge him, or any one, Ruth; but

no, I do not think him a truly converted man. Conversion signifies change, Ruth, and I have never seen any signs of a real change in Richard Taylor.'

Nor were there any. Though he had, by his mother's wish, earnestly seconded by his cousin Minnie, presented himself as a candidate for Confirmation almost immediately after his return from America, and had openly taken upon himself the solemn vows of renunciation, faith, and obedience, he had never made a single real effort to cast off the works either of the world, the flesh, or the devil. Constantly as he pronounced with his lips the holy doctrines of Christian belief, never yet had any one of these doctrines found a place in his heart, whilst the one desire of his soul was to please his cousin Minnie and win her favour, caring little or nothing whether or not in doing so he was obeying God and following His commandments. His evil nature remained as strong within him as ever it had been in the day when he picked up Mr. Abbott's cheque in the street and hid it from sight, allowing the blame of having stolen it to rest on his innocent companion. Never yet had he truly sought to be delivered from the guilt of that sin in particular, or of sin in general, much less had he taken the further step of seeking deliverance from the power of all sin. Regularly as he drew near to God's Holy Table, it was with no consciousness of his weakness, no desire to receive spiritual strength to conquer sin and overcome temptation, and give himself body, soul, and spirit to God's service. Regular as he was in his attendance at church, diligent as he appeared to be in his duties as a Sunday-school teacher and a member of the choir, every carnal affection of the flesh lived powerfully within him, and all things belonging to the Spirit were as yet utterly unknown to him. The old Adam had never been buried, or the new man raised within him. Richard Taylor was still, as the Vicar and Ruth imagined him to be, an unconverted man.

CHAPTER XIX.

HOLY BAPTISM.

RETURNING unexpectedly from his office one day, Mr. Prescott was surprised to find his young wife sitting at work with an expression of evident anxiety on the face which was usually so bright that the faintest shadow upon it was sufficient to raise an anxious thought in his mind.

A glance at their little son, now grown quite a big boy, and a very lovely one, playing on the floor with his bricks, his face rosy with health and his eyes merry with glee, prevented his asking the first question that would have risen to his lips had little Godfrey been in his nursery.

But the first glimpse of her husband brought such a gleam of sunshine into Ruth's face as at once drove from it every sign of gloom. No tones could have been brighter than those with which she welcomed him.

'Fancy my not knowing that it was you,' she said. 'I believe that is the very first time that I have not recognised your knock;' and with one of those caresses which were quite as tender, or perhaps rather more so, than they had ever been in the earliest days of their married happiness, she inquired 'what brought him back so delightfully early.'

Mr. Prescott made no inquiry in return as to what had caused her to look so grave when he entered, though he fully intended to know, and also to discover, if possible, some

means of removing the cause, whatever it might be. Any trouble to Ruth was tenfold a trouble to him, as no one knew so well as Ruth herself. And this it was that had taught her to try to set aside every little care at the first sound of her husband's footstep. He had his own worries, she knew—no one could do as much work as he did without having them ; but he always left them at the office. She, on her part, had hers—no woman who looked to the ways of her household as well as she did could be altogether free from them ; but unless she needed her husband's advice, or the trouble was one which it was right he also should know, Ruth sought to keep it to herself. 'He went to the office to work,' she used to say laughingly ; 'he came home to rest, or, if he was not tired and did not want rest, to play—to play with her and little Godfrey.'

'Am I not welcome?' he said in answer to her question. 'If so, I can go back again, for I have left some work to be done to-morrow which I had meant to do to-day, only it is such a very lovely afternoon, I thought I would give you and Minnie the treat of a drive. Where is Minnie?' he added ; 'one does not often find Godfrey here without her.'

That the shadow of which he had caught sight had something to do with Minnie, Mr. Prescott's quick discernment perceived at once.

'Is there anything amiss?' he asked. Have you and Minnie been quarrelling? That would be something quite new.'

'Quite new, indeed,' she said ; 'though in Minnie's younger days, Leonard, we were not always such good friends as we have been since you have known us. She was my special charge, you know, and she was not always easy to manage.'

'I can quite believe that,' he replied. 'Minnie Davis has too much character to have been very easily controlled.'

'No one will ever control Minnie,' said Ruth thoughtfully.

'No one?' he said, with a smile. 'Is not that remark somewhat in contradiction to what you yourself said of her only a few days ago? But,' he added, with a glance at his watch, 'if we are to carry on a discussion about Minnie, I think it had better be in the carriage, for I ordered it to be here in a quarter of an hour. We will have a quiet drive together, if you would like that better, and ask Minnie to take little Godfrey to hear the band play.'

'Minnie will not care to go to the parade this afternoon, Leonard.'

'Another mystery!' exclaimed Mr. Prescott. 'Why, Ruth, what can have made Minnie so contradictory? I thought going to hear the band play was one of the things she most enjoyed in Uxminster.'

'So it is generally,' said Ruth, 'but it would not be to-day. I will tell you why not when we are out, for here *is* the carriage. And Minnie and I could not, under any circumstances, both have gone out this afternoon; for I have given Esther a holiday, never imagining that you meant to put in such an early appearance. We should be home too late for us to take Godfrey with us, so one of us must remain with him.'

And she ran away to get her bonnet and to give little Godfrey into Minnie's charge.

'Not much appearance of being contradictory now,' said Mr. Prescott, as he took his place by his wife's side and the carriage drove off, leaving Minnie Davis on the doorstep, with smiling face, holding up little Godfrey in her arms for a last look at his parents.

'I did not say she was contradictory,' said Ruth. 'That is the last word I should have applied to anyone so sweet-tempered. I said she was not easily controlled.'

'And yet you said the other day that it gave you a very responsible feeling to possess so much influence over her.'

'Influence!—yes,' said Ruth; 'but influence is not con-

trol. Don't you think that it is just the people who are most impatient of control who are most open to influence?'

'Perhaps you are right, Ruthie. Yes, I think you are. Unconscious influence tells upon such characters. Direct guidance they would perceive and resist, but silent influence works unconsciously, and leads them to exercise the control over themselves to which they would never submit from others. But what has that to do with Minnie's not wishing to go to hear the band play on the parade this afternoon?

'Oh, nothing. But we had a visitor this morning, Leonard. Her cousin Richard came, and stayed to lunch. He had only just left when you came in. He said he had promised a friend to go with him to hear the band.'

'So of course Minnie would not go. I quite understand now, Ruth. You could scarcely have expected her to do so. She does not seem more partial to her cousin than she used to be, though certainly the poor fellow could not take more trouble than he does to make her so. But she evidently dislikes him as much as ever, and I am afraid so do you, Ruthie.'

'I am afraid I do, Leonard, though I really have tried hard to get over the feeling, for his mother's sake. I like her so much, and she is wrapped up in her son. She has the highest opinion of him.'

'Abbott gives him a very good character. He says he has not a more reliable clerk in the place.'

'And father says,' replied Ruth, 'that there is not a more regular attendant both at church and at the Holy Communion. And yet, somehow or other, I don't think he believes in him any more than I do. It is not only that I don't like him—we can't like all good people—but I can't believe in him. And, what is more, I believe you are be-

ginning to think so too. You used to stand up for him, and think I was influenced in my opinions by past events. But I don't think you believe in him yourself—at least, not entirely.'

And she looked into her husband's face with large, wide-open, questioning eyes.

'My own wife provoking me to uncharitable feeling and expressions!' he said. 'Is that being a help-meet, Ruthie?'

'I wonder whether I ought to have told you his story?' said Ruth. 'I have never felt quite happy about it, and you know, Leonard, it was a long time before I did tell you. It was not until you said one day that he gave one the idea of having always been very careful in his conduct, which perhaps accounted for the want of humility in his manner. Now I think sometimes that I was wrong to let out the secret even to you. But if I had not told you, it would have been the only secret I should ever have kept from you.'

'Well, you certainly need never make yourself unhappy about this one, Ruth. I am not likely ever to come into sufficiently close connection with Richard Taylor to be able either to help or to hinder him in making his way in the world. Besides,' he added, 'if I have come round in measure to your feeling about this young man, it is certainly not caused by any knowledge of the past. On the contrary, that would influence me very decidedly in his favour if he were a true penitent.'

'Like Johnnie Grainger!' exclaimed Ruth.

'Like John Grainger, Ruthie. No one can wish to have been guilty of any evil act. Everyone must feel thankful for the restraining and assisting grace that has withheld him from openly breaking any one of God's commandments; but many a man might long for the deep humility of heart, the hatred of sin, and, at the same time, the deep sympathy with sinners, which have been the outcome of young Grainger's early fall and real repentance. He is a very

remarkable young Christian, Ruthie. I feel it more and more every time I talk with him.'

'I do so like to hear you say so!' exclaimed Ruth, with enthusiasm; 'for, fond as I am of all the Little Burton people, I don't like anyone as well as I do Johnnie—except, of course, Minnie. Father always says that John Grainger is his living commentary on the doctrine of repentance—that when he is seeking to make people understand what repentance really is, he feels inclined to say, "Look at John Grainger, and see it all explained in him." It makes me so happy that he should be in your employ,' said Ruth.

'It makes me equally so, Ruth, for I can't say how useful he is to me. If I gave him a place in my office to please you, I have certainly kept him on and promoted him to please myself.'

'It was principally to please old David,' said Ruth. 'He had such a strong idea that there was a sore feeling in his heart at Mr. Abbott's having given that vacant clerkship to Richard Taylor instead of to him, as he might have done.'

'I should think that was rather an imagination of old David's,' said Mr. Prescott, 'or that, in his case, the fear was father to the thought. John Grainger is not a man to feel sore at another man's being preferred to him, or at all events to let anyone see that he was. The very consciousness of such a feeling would lead him to stamp it out as utterly unworthy of a place in his heart.'

'I don't know,' said Ruth gravely. 'He was in very low spirits just at that time. Don't you remember telling me that when you asked him to that choir picnic you gave, he did not at first seem at all willing to come?'

'No, he did not; but how merry he was when he was there! No one helped me so much in amusing the boys. I recollect saying that I did not think John Grainger had so much fun in him.'

'I expect he *was* sore about it, and overcame the feeling. He is such a loving-hearted fellow, I don't believe he could live in enmity with anyone. He certainly is "rooted in charity." Love for his fellow-creatures seems to come almost naturally to him.'

'And the rest comes by grace, then, Ruthie; for no one can doubt the reality of his faith, or wish to see anyone more joyful.'

'Yes,' said Ruth; 'I believe it is just that. For old David has often told me what weak faith his was in the beginning—how he was always full of self-reproaches, and never could quite believe that he was forgiven. I have heard him say many times that he had never known anyone in whose mind it was so difficult to keep the balance between sorrow for past sin and thankful happiness in the Saviour's free pardon. His character is not at all a joyful one by nature. He is much more inclined to be despondent.'

'It is given unto us to believe, Ruth. Faith is the gift of God. And so are joy and hope—the one the result of the other—both the fruits of the Holy Spirit. There can be no true joy or hope without repentance, but neither can there be true repentance, or, at all events complete and perfect repentance, without the faith and joy which are its necessary results, the fruit which it is bound to bear if its root is good.'

CHAPTER XX.

HOLY BAPTISM.

'YOUNG Taylor is remaining here over to-morrow,' said Mr. Prescott, as he came into the drawing-room on the following afternoon, as much later than his usual hour as he had been earlier on the preceding day; and, taking three concert-tickets from his pocket, gave them to Ruth.

'Indeed!' she said. 'How do you know? You have not seen him, have you?'

'No, but Grainger told me at the office to-day. He gave me the news quite suddenly, to my great surprise; for, as you may suppose, there was nothing in our communications together to lead to the subject of Richard Taylor's movements, and Grainger is not given to mentioning his own affairs, unless I question him about them, much less other people's. But he told me this as though it was quite a matter of importance to himself.'

'What did he say?' asked Ruth.

'Merely that Richard Taylor was remaining here until to-morrow, and would be at the concert for which I had just made him a present of a ticket. He said that the friend with whom Taylor was staying had begged him to remain in order to go to it.'

'I am very sorry,' said Ruth.

'So you seem, Ruthie. You think, I suppose, that Richard Taylor's being there will spoil Minnie's pleasure.

But I dare say she will not care to go to it now. She is not very keen about music. I expect she will be just as well pleased to stay here, if she does not wish to have young Taylor hovering round her all the evening.'

Ruth had her doubts; and these were confirmed when, on telling Minnie how things stood, she found that her heart was a great deal more set on going to the concert now than it had been before, in spite of Richard Taylor's prolonged stay in the place, and the certainty of his presence at it.

'She is a strange girl,' said Mr. Prescott. 'She would not go to the band yesterday, though she delights in seeing the people, and especially the children, and in watching Godfrey's pleasure, because her cousin Richard would have been there; and to-day she is resolved to go to this concert, though the music is all of a character she understands nothing about, and won't enjoy in the least.'

Ruth hesitated for a moment; loyalty to her friend, whose secret, if secret there existed, it was, struggling with the intense difficulty she always experienced in keeping from her husband any thought, or fear, or feeling of her mind. Then she said:

'Richard Taylor was going alone to hear the band play yesterday. His friend was engaged at his work all the afternoon. He will be free this evening to go to the concert with him.'

'And is that an attraction to Minnie?'

Mr. Prescott spoke lightly, a smile on his face. But there was no answering smile on Ruth's.

'I am afraid it is,' she said gravely.

'Why afraid, Ruth? Who is this young man?'

'His name is Alfred Dent, and he has some employment in Mr. Greer's musical warehouse.'

'And what do you know about him?' he continued.

'Very little, except that he is very handsome.'

'Which is not in itself anything against him. Do you know anything of his character? I should not have thought Richard Taylor was at all likely to have a bad man as his friend, if only for the sake of his own reputation.'

Ruth hesitated again.

'I know nothing about him, Leonard, except this, which I did not repeat to you because you have such an objection to my telling you anything like gossip, and also I did not care to say it. But when I sent Esther a few weeks ago to carry some music to Greer's, she asked if your messenger might take it when he brought your bag home in the evening. It was so unlike Esther to make an objection to anything I asked her to do, that I rather pressed her for her reasons, and she told me that she really could not bear any more the way in which that young Dent looked at her and spoke to her.'

'Poor little Esther!' said Mr. Prescott. 'She is a very shy, modest girl, and I am afraid her pretty face must often be a trouble to her.'

'Yes,' said Ruth. 'I have seen people staring at her in this drawing-room, when she has brought in the children, until I could have found it in my heart to reprove them.'

'So have I; it is a shame,' replied Mr. Prescott. Not adding, however, that he had administered more than one reproof on this very subject. 'But we were not speaking of your pretty nurse, Ruth, but of your pretty friend, or *protégée*, or whatever you consider Minnie to be. What does she know about this forward young fellow?'

'A good deal, I am afraid, Leonard. He was staying with the Taylors at Little Burton for some time, and I fancy she saw a great deal of him there. But I don't think he can be a forward young fellow, from what Minnie tells me.'

'I judged from what you said of his manner to Esther. A man must be pretty impertinent for a nice, sensible girl like Esther, who has not a scrap of vanity or self-conscious-

ness about her, to be unwilling to go into a shop on account of his rudeness. Did you tell Minnie this of her acquaintance?'

'I said something about it to her, but she fired up at once in defence of her friend. You know how Minnie can fire up when she is excited.'

'I can't say I know,' he replied, 'but I can quite imagine it. Anyone whose pulses are as quick as Minnie's must have it in her nature to fire up, as you call it, though the sweetness of her temper may prevent the combustible matter in her from being often touched. And she stood up for young Dent, did she?'

'Valiantly. She was determined either to imagine it a fancy of Esther's, or that she was speaking of some other young man. She declares that no one can have better or more respectful manners than this young Mr. Dent.'

'Well,' said Mr. Prescott, 'I will have a look at him to-night.'

And so he had, repeating to his wife afterwards the impression he had formed of him.

'Certainly he is not forward or impertinent,' said Ruth. 'Minnie was right in saying that he had charming manners. I was quite struck by the way in which he spoke both to you and me, as well as to Minnie herself. He seemed to know exactly how each one of us should be treated.'

'And so kept his forwardness or impertinence for pretty servant-maids like Esther,' said Mr. Prescott. 'You see,' he added, 'I am disposed to be even more severe than you, Ruthie. Young Dent's nice ways and looks have had the effect of removing part of the unfavourable impression concerning him which Esther's words had produced on you. They have not had that effect upon me. I watched him pretty closely this evening, and though I could not mention a thing about his conduct which would seem of any great consequence, I felt quite sufficiently convinced of the sort

of young fellow he is to negative the request he made me to be allowed to call upon his acquaintance, Miss Davis, during her stay with us.'

'Minnie will be dreadfully vexed,' said Ruth. 'She told me this evening that he was going to ask your leave to call on her, and had promised to get her tickets for another concert, of which Mr. Greer has the management, and to find some friends of his to take her with them. She was quite excited about it. Her cheeks were flushed, and her eyes bright, just as they were at the concert. I think I have never seen her look so pretty as she did all this evening. Mrs. Bevan remarked to me what a lovely girl she was, and how much she enjoyed the music.'

'There can't be two opinions about the first fact, Ruthie, one does not often see a girl like Minnie Davis; but I very much doubt whether it was the music that caused her enjoyment this evening.'

'I know it was not,' said Ruth eagerly; 'it was the pleasure of being with young Dent. He talks delightfully, certainly, and he is very good-looking. Oh, how grieved, how miserable I shall be if she has fixed her heart on him, and he is not a good man!'

'Which I am very much afraid he is not Ruth; but we will judge nothing before the time. I shall make it a duty to find out all about him, and if he proves to be the sort of man which it would be a sin in a Christian girl like Minnie to think of as a husband, you must use your influence to make her see her duty.'

'But if his influence is stronger than mine, Leonard? and it will be. I know Minnie so well.'

'But you think her a Christian girl, Ruthie?'

Ruth hesitated.

'Yes,' she said, 'I think she is. But she is so weak, so very weak. And yet,' she added, 'she has a strong will.'

'A strong will and a weak character,' replied Mr. Prescott;

'an unfortunate combination. She does, indeed, require to be upheld by religious principle. Otherwise, what can we expect but that the strength of her will, siding with the weakness of her nature, will lead her to fall an easy prey to temptation? The world and the devil will not fail to do their best to strengthen the weak nature. We must do all we can to strengthen her religious principle.'

'By our prayers, then,' said Ruth. 'If, as I fancy, Minnie has fixed her heart on this young man, and if, as you fear, he is not a good man, I see no other way of helping her than by praying for her. For of course, Leonard, his power will be a thousand times greater than mine.'

'She loves you very much, Ruth. You have been her best friend all her life. Her heart must be full of gratitude to you.'

'Yes, yes!' she answered eagerly, 'I know all that; but she won't think of her love for me when once this fascinating young man has got possession of her heart. All her love for me, and she is very loving, will be forgotten for the time. It will go down as that little boat you were telling us about last night went down before that great ship. She will not think of me, or of anyone, but only of him. No; I can do nothing for her but pray.'

And Ruth burst into tears. Her excessive emotion did not surprise her husband, though he felt some regret at having called it forth.

'You must not give way, Ruthie,' he said gently; 'you are not strong, and you will hurt yourself. You say, truly, that prayer can do what we are powerless to do. You will pray for Minnie.'

'Pray for her—I should think I would! God has been very good to me, Leonard. I will pray to Him with all my heart, asking Him to be as good to Minnie.'

And Ruth did pray for her friend—prayed as perhaps no one could have prayed who had not herself been saved from

the very edge of a similar precipice. She saw its dangers plainly now; though at the time they were as completely hidden from her eyes as they were at this moment from Minnie's by the flowers, that, growing thick and fair, concealed from sight the depths of shame and misery that lay beneath.

And Minnie—poor little orphan Minnie—had no parents to protect her, no wise, good father, no tender, loving mother, to whom she owed a sacred duty, and whose gray hairs she would have grieved to bring with sorrow to the grave.

CHAPTER XXI.

HOLY BAPTISM.

For once in her life, Ruth Prescott was carrying rather a heavy heart with her to Little Burton. Pretty Esther, sitting opposite to her, with a fresh charge upon her lap—the baby-girl, who, in her eyes, surpassed in charms even 'Master Godfrey,' whom, until now, she had believed to be the most lovely and intelligent child that this world's sun had ever shone upon—wondered within herself why a grave expression should gather on her mistress's face. For little Godfrey was sitting beside his mother in his usual bright health, and in more than his usual merry spirits, prattling of grandpapa, and grandmamma, and godmother, and all the things that he was to see, and laughing for very laughter's sake. And though Mr. Prescott was not with them, they had left him in perfect health and spirits, saying, as he saw them off at the station, that he would follow them in less than a week. Why, then, should her mistress's sweet face wear an anxious look to-day? Thus did she wonder within herself; not from inquisitiveness—her nature was too refined for that—but from the great love she bore to that dear mistress, which made her quick to perceive any sign either of sickness or of sorrow.

There could be no trouble awaiting her at Little Burton, for Mr. Prescott had said something at parting about this being likely to be an even pleasanter visit to the Vicarage

than the last, since they would all be together for the first time since the two sisters' marriages—Helen and Harold, and the children, and Herbert also.

But Mrs. Prescott's face *was* grave, and as they drew near the town, and she took a letter from her bag and read it, evidently with careful thought, it became graver still.

Esther recognised the handwriting, and knew at once that her mistress's anxiety had something to do with Minnie Davis. Instantly she drove the thought from her mind, for, though incapable of curiosity, she was not incapable of jealousy; and, loving her sweet young mistress as she did, almost, if not altogether making an idol of her, Esther had never been so happy since Minnie Davis had come to live with them as she had been before.

But no one had ever known this—least of all Mrs. Prescott herself. If Esther had been so weak in heart, so selfish and so silly, as to let it be a grief to see Minnie rendering the little services to her mistress which, until she came, it had been the very delight of her heart to render, she had never shown sign, either by word or look, of its being so.

'Minnie saves you a good deal of trouble, Esther,' Mrs. Prescott had said one day, as the young nurse came into the room where Minnie Davis was brushing out the long hair, every tress of which Esther loved to take into her hand, because it was so dear to her for her sweet lady's sake.

And though Esther could not find it in her heart to answer, as she gave the baby into its mother's arms, there was no ruffle on her brow, no gloomy expression in her eyes, which would have told that rather would she have sat up working far into the night, or have risen hours earlier in the morning, after very broken rest, than have seen another doing what she so delighted to do for the being whom she loved best on earth.

Her fellow-servants told her sometimes laughingly that she worshipped her mistress.

It was one of the many true words said in jest, and, to Esther's sensitive conscience, it had served often as a reproof. For worship belongs to one alone ; and let a human face and a human voice be as true and pure in themselves as they may be, when once they come between us and our devotions, as Esther knew had often been the case with her, that face and that voice are a temptation.

It was not for her to think of what was troubling her mistress now—still less must she allow a thought of Minnie Davis to remain in her mind.

Little Godfrey began to ask his mother questions as they drew near the town, and, his mother being still engrossed with her letters—for she had taken two or three more in the same writing from her bag, and was giving them careful consideration—Esther set herself to answer them.

The great cloud now almost hanging over them, she told the little fellow, was not rain, as he fancied ; it was only smoke—the smoke from the big factories she would take him to see this time.

Mrs. Prescott put away her letters and her grave face together, and began to talk to them.

'You like Little Burton better than you did when first you came here, Esther?'

'I don't think it any prettier, ma'am,' she said ; 'but I always like to be at the Vicarage ; and I have got to know so many people now.'

'And to like them too, Esther?'

'Oh, very much, ma'am.'

'You used to think them terribly rough and rude,' said Mrs. Prescott, smiling. 'They are not very polite in their manner, I must say, but they have warm, grateful hearts ; and everyone who knows them must admire their wonderful courage in bearing up against difficulties, and their persevering energy in fighting bravely the battle of life, often a very hard one. I suppose one always clings to one's earliest

associations, to the friends of one's childhood. But to me there are no people like the Little Burton people.'

Esther's thoughts returned to Minnie Davis. As if in reply to them, Mrs. Prescott continued:

'Though all the Little Burton people are not wanting in manners—Minnie Davis is peculiarly gentle; but of course she has been well educated, and her aunt is so very superior. But, taking them all together, I own they are rather a rough set.'

'Certainly those girls are,' she added, as the railway carried them across a bridge just over a long, straight street of stiffly-built houses, all exactly alike—small and dirty-looking outside, however clean some might be within—at the end of which, opposite to each other, stood two huge factories, blackened with smoke, from which at that moment was pouring a stream of human beings, the women and girls, who, for the most part, were comfortably though untidily dressed, with shawls drawn over their heads, jostling each other, as they hurried along the street to east and west, quite as fearlessly and rudely as the roughest of the men.

Mrs. Prescott saw in Esther's face the feeling which she had often heard her express.

'You think it dreadful to be a factory-girl, Esther? It is a trying life, certainly, and one full of temptation—of danger to the soul as well as to the mind and body. But there are many young girls living that life who, though their manners may want refinement from ignorance and lack of education, are as pure and innocent in heart and life as any village maiden. I will take you to see one this time, Esther—one of my former Sunday-scholars, and as sweet and gentle a girl as ever lived. I loved her better than any of my girls, except, of course, Minnie. She had never entered either a school or church before Mr. Heathcote came to Little Burton. She was the first factory-girl whom he persuaded

to come to the Iron Church, which is now our Mission-room, and one of the very first to give her heart to God. And now she is going to Him. Mrs. Heathcote tells me she is thankful I am paying my visit earlier this year, for if we had delayed till June she does not think I should have seen her.'

'Is it consumption?' asked Esther, who had often heard her mistress say how many at Little Burton fell victims to that terrible malady.

'Yes; like many others, her health has given way under factory work. She was healthy enough as a child, with a complexion that one rarely saw in Little Burton children, so clear and bright; but she was put to work at what they call 'carding'—you saw them at it, Esther, in Mr. Hardman's factories?'

'Yes,' said Esther; 'and I wondered then how they could stand it all day long. The room seemed full of white powder; it made me cough only to be there for a few minutes. There's no fluff like that in Mr. Abbott's, where they have that great wheel.'

'No,' said Mrs. Prescott, 'for it makes a draught sufficient to carry away all the dust. But that great wheel cost thousands of pounds. Mr. Abbott had it put into the carding-room because he knew how many young girls were simply killed, as Annie Colman has been, by the dust from the cotton getting into their lungs. Mrs. Heathcote says hers are almost gone. But she is so patient, and happy—always cheerful.'

'I should very much like to see her,' said Esther; 'it seems sad to die so young.'

'And one would think it would be specially sad for her, Esther; for, after having suffered great privation all her life—the orphan grand-daughter of a bedridden old woman, for whom she and the parish provided between them—life was just offering her some pleasant prospects, in her engagement

to a very well-off young man in Mr. Hardman's office. He had stopped her work in the factory, seeing how delicate she was, and they were to have been married almost immediately, when she suddenly became so very ill as to make it impossible. And now she is dying.'

'Poor girl!' said Esther again.

'And yet she calls herself rich, Esther, and is perfectly resigned. She told Mrs. Heathcote that she felt in her very soul that God was taking her away from temptations which she knew she would not have had strength to bear; for that, even before there was any prospect of her ever enjoying the good things of this world, she felt such a longing for them. I can quite believe it; for, when she was my little charge, and could not afford to buy even a new bonnet-ribbon, I have often seen the envying eyes she used to cast at some of the other girls' finery.'

'Some of these girls dress so smart,' said Esther.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Prescott, 'the love of dress is one of their chief temptations. That and the temptation of evil company are our girls' great difficulties in leading good lives—in really fulfilling their baptismal vow to renounce the flesh and the devil.'

Esther thought to herself that this was hard enough to do under any circumstances—even the most favourable; for, with everything to help her, she herself had been carrying on a pretty sharp, though secret, warfare in that quiet railway-carriage with the flesh and the devil, in striving to overcome the feelings that the very thought of Minnie Davis and the constant mention of her name excited within her. She had forgotten her during the last half-hour in the interest of the conversation with Mrs. Prescott about Annie Colman. But the struggle began again when the train rolled into the station, and foremost, to Esther's eyes, though standing behind many others in a group of waiting, welcoming figures, stood Minnie Davis, looking, Esther thought to herself,

prettier than ever, in her spring dress, so fresh and tasteful—put on, indeed, for the first time that morning in honour of Mrs. Prescott's arrival.

It must be delightful, Esther thought, to dress like that, and look like that; to wear just what was most becoming without consulting anyone's wish except one's own, as servants like herself had to do. It must be such a comfort to have a sum of money, as she knew Minnie Davis had, in the bank, and to be able to do just what one liked with it. Above all must it be delightful to receive the loving shake of the hand and the sweet words of welcome which Minnie Davis was at that moment receiving from Mrs. Prescott, and which Esther felt she would give anything she possessed to receive herself.

'You have not forgotten Minnie, have you, my pet?'

And Minnie held out her arms to Baby Frances, who, without a second invitation, held out hers in response, and, forgetting her shyness for the first time since she had become old enough to be conscious of the difference between friends and strangers, suffered herself to be taken from Esther's arms and carried lovingly in Minnie's to the cab.

'Baby cannot possibly remember you,' said Mrs. Prescott.

'No, of course she cannot,' Esther said to herself, following alone behind; for Godfrey had been seized upon by aunt and cousins. 'Of course she cannot, but Minnie's fascinating looks and ways win everybody's heart away from others to herself, even baby's.'

CHAPTER XXII.

HOLY BAPTISM.

LITTLE Godfrey took a conscious part in Divine service for the first time in his short life in the Church of St. Simon and St. Jude on the following Sunday. It was an eventful day to him. His parents had done all in their power to secure its being so; for it was a day they longed for him to remember. For months had they been preparing his little mind to look upon this day as a very important one, and it was a great delight to them, when, on running into their room that morning as usual, to kneel beside his mother's knee and repeat his morning prayers, he added to them of himself, without reminder from them, the words he had been taught in readiness for to-day's event, and asked that God might make him a good boy in church, and teach him to remember that it was God's Holy House.

'I am to go and see godmother before I go to church,' he said, standing erect afterwards by his mother's side, and looking so fresh and fair in his new Sunday suit that he reminded her of another darling boy of the same name, and very much the same bearing, who had been her pride and joy in early days, and who seemed to be living again now—only, to her eyes, in a yet fairer form, and one still dearer to her heart.

His father inquired if he knew why he was to go to see his godmother, and he said 'Yes, of course' (he had already

caught up his cousin Harold's favourite expression, in the eagerness of his desire to imitate that 'big boy'); 'of course he knew, she told him again yesterday, it was because she was his godmother, and had promised for him that he should be good, and come to church, and learn about God. She said he would have gone with her to-day, only poor godmother was too sick, so he must come and see her on his way to church, and give her a sweet Sunday kiss.'

'And had she promised to do anything more?' his father asked.

And the child answered at once, for the tone in which the words had been said had impressed them on his mind:

'Yes, she would pray for him that God would make him a very good boy, and never let him listen to what the devil, or his naughty heart, or wicked boys told him to do.'

'He is happy in having such a godmother,' said Mr. Prescott, as the boy ran off to his breakfast in the nursery—the nursery over which at this moment Hannah was presiding in the most joyful mind.

These were Hannah's golden days. Perhaps the strongest characteristic of her nature, next to her great love of children, was her extreme independence—not an uncommon feature in north-country folk. The first of these characteristics she had been able to gratify fully during her long residence in Mr. Heathcote's family; but the latter had been kept well in check for many years, for old nurse allowed no one except her mistress to rule in her nursery, and perhaps the mistress's rule might not have been as happy and peaceful as it had been, but for the tact and wisdom which had led that gentle lady to withhold from the first any signs of authority over the faithful servant who had reigned supreme before she came there. For some years now, that faithful nurse had been laid beneath the same granite cross in Little Burton cemetery which sheltered the sleep of her first dear mistress, and of her delicate little daughter Agnes, and of little

Godfrey, her second mistress's 'one wee lambie,' whom she loved only next best to her 'own baby boy,' as she always called Herbert, even after he had grown to be six feet high, and had become an articled pupil in Mr. Prescott's office.

Long before her death, however, nurse had needed much more care from others than she could give to anyone, but even when unable to see the work which Hannah did under her direction, she insisted on giving every instruction concerning it, considering herself the responsible person, and taking to herself the praise of its successful performance.

So that it had only been of late years that Hannah had at all been able to realize how useful she was, and how highly she was valued in the household, where, long after the 'young ladies' had grown to be mothers and mistresses, she remained on as sewing-maid and confidential servant, stitching sometimes for the poor, sometimes for the grandchildren, and holding a very happy and responsible position in Little Burton Vicarage.

But it was when 'the young ladies' came back on visits to the old home that Hannah's happiness was complete. And most of all was it so when Mrs. Prescott came, and brought little 'Master Godfrey' with her.

Very fond and very proud was Hannah of Mrs. Moorhouse's children. Many a half hour would she spend, pouring into old David's ready ear long accounts of Master Harold's cleverness: how he could repeat pages of poetry by heart, and knew ever such a lot about everything; or describing Miss Winifred's beauty, and wishing that David could see what lovely hair she had, and what beautiful eyes, more like her Aunt Ruthie's than her mother's, so bright and blue, and full of fun.

But yet little Godfrey was Hannah's darling, and of this old David was well aware, though all Hannah's enthusiastic praises of his looks and his talents never shook for an

instant his belief that 'there could never be any such other children as Miss Helen's bairns.'

'But I wish, Mr. Graham, you could see Master Godfrey,' Hannah had declared the evening before. 'I do so wish you could see him just once, only for a moment, as he looked to-day when I tried on the suit I have made for him to wear to-morrow—he's going to church for the first time.'

'Yes; I know,' David said. 'He told me so when he came in with Master Harold and Miss Winifred.'

'And he's as proud of it as proud can be,' continued Hannah; 'as proud as if he were going to the king's palace to see the king.'

'Which is just what he is going to do, Hannah,' said David.

'Quite true, Mr. Graham,' she replied. 'You've always got a word of teaching to give me, let me be talking of what I may. Well, they've taught him to look on his going to church for the first time as quite a grand event. It's curious to hear him going on about it, being such a little fellow as he is. But he isn't a bit like other children, Mr. Graham. You'd say he wasn't if you knew him as well as I do. He's like two or three children all in one—he's so different at times from what he is at others. Master Harold, he is all for his books, and wanting to do something or other; and Miss Winifred, she's all for her play, and wanting to do nothing at all. But Master Godfrey—one time he will be so full of spirit there's no holding him in.'

'Then he is your "ruffian,"' said David, smiling.

'Yes,' said Hannah; 'then he's my ruffian—bless him! That's our oldest joke. I wonder how long he'll remember it. That was what he used to call himself the very first time he came to stay here after he had learned to speak really well. He would run across the nursery to frighten me, and, when I asked him what he was, put on such a face and shake his little fists, and say he was "a ruffian;" and

then the minute afterwards—thinking, I believe, he really had frightened me—he would come up and lay his pretty head on "poor Hannah's shoulder" and say he was "Hannah's boy—Hannah's *darling* boy.'

'Well, don't you make an idol of him—that's all,' the old man had said many times. And certainly he would have felt inclined to say it once more this morning if he had seen the look which Hannah gave the boy as he returned from his mother's room and took his seat at the breakfast-table.

'It's a good thing I have not got him always with me,' she said to Esther; 'it's quite enough to have him for a few weeks at a time. If I had him always—I believe Mr. Graham is right—he'd be an idol to me. I wonder he is not more of one to you, Esther.'

'I'm sure I'm fond enough of him,' Esther replied; 'but then, you see, I've got baby too.'

'And she's your chief idol, I believe.'

'No,' said Esther; 'I don't think I make idols of either of them.'

Nor did she, although at that moment idolatry—creature-worship—was the special sin struggling within her soul for mastery.

Little did Godfrey dream what a subject of interest his going to church for the first time that day was to many besides himself.

Mr. Abbott found his wife lying on the sofa in her boudoir with her Prayer-book in her hand, open at the Baptismal Service, and the signs of tears on her pale face.

'Not tears of sorrow,' she said, in reply to his remonstrance; 'but this service is a very solemn one.'

'And you will join in it here whilst we are joining in it in church?' he said.

'Yes; but I have been thinking how lovely it would be to go with you.'

'My poor Margaret,' he replied, sitting down beside her

and taking her thin hand in his, 'I am afraid Dr. Blunt's opinion has been a great blow to you.'

For there had been a consultation on the previous day with a London physician, who had given it as his decided opinion that though Mrs. Abbott might live for years, it must always be as the invalid that she was now. And invalidism to one of Mrs. Abbott's nature was a very great trial, although God's grace was making it to her what it is to so many, a very 'sacrament of blessing,' bringing her closer to the Saviour than she had ever drawn in the days of her health. The furrows in her soul had been very deeply ploughed, but only that the seed of God's Holy Word might enter more abundantly into the soil, and the dews of His heavenly grace might water it yet more richly.

'If it has been a blow,' she answered, raising her eyes, in which shone the sweetest expression of submission, to his, which were fixed on her with the tenderest sympathy, 'I have found the balm for it.'

'Has this been the balm?' he asked, glancing at the Prayer-book which lay upon the silk coverlet of her couch. It was open at the Lord's Prayer.

'Yes,' she said; 'it has been the subject which I have chosen for my meditation this morning, in seeking what I desire for my god-child and myself. And oh! William, it seems to express my every want for this life and the next. In that one prayer, short and simple as it is, the whole Church of God, the most advanced Christian, like dear old David, and the feeblest and weakest may join with one accord in expressing to their Father in heaven their sorrow and humiliation for every wrong-doing, asking Him for all their hearts can desire of temporal or spiritual good, and offering to Him their praises and thanksgivings, and their highest adoration.'

Well might Mr. Prescott say that little Godfrey was favoured in having such a sponsor as Mrs. Abbott.

Mr. Heathcote made the same remark to old David Graham that afternoon. He had himself taken his little grandson to see his godmother in the morning, and although he had left him alone with her for the short interview she desired to have with him, the few words of conversation he had held with her afterwards, the very look on her face, had shown him how truly she had comprehended and entered into the spiritual relationship established between herself and his little grandson.

It was long now since old David had seen 'the master's sweet lady,' but this only made him the more keenly interested in all that anyone could tell him about her.

'I thought of her to-day,' he said. 'Poor dear! There was not anyone in church that had a closer sympathy with her than old David Graham. My prayers were with the little lamb who came to church this morning for the first time—Miss Ruthie's boy. Though my poor eyes could not be gladdened by the sight of him, I *felt* him very close beside me when the Baptismal hymn was sung:

> "'May his future life confess
> Thine he is, and loves to be:
> All his journey hold him fast,
> Bring him safely home at last."

'It seemed a bit hard not to see him, after all Hannah had said about him yesterday; but I thought how much harder it was for the dear lady that had stood godmother for him never once to worship in the same church with him—not at his Baptism—not now—or ever, from what they tell me. And such a true godmother as she must be! No truer, I should think, has ever existed since those old days you told me of, sir, when god-parents were first appointed.'

'The days of Tertullian and St. Augustine,' said Mr. Heathcote, smiling. 'Yes, sponsors existed a very long

time ago—as far back as the second century. You have a good memory, David.'

'For some things, sir; and I have often thought about that, because people do make so light of such things nowadays. And they are so ignorant about them, too. Why, the very things that are the oldest, stamped deepest with the seal of time, and made sacred by the usage of thousands of God's truest saints, we hear called "new-fangled" by ignorant folks that don't know what they are talking about. There's Andrew Lovell. He knew no more about Baptism than a baby, and yet he talked against it by the hour, and found folk to listen to him and think him a mighty clever fellow. But he's been convinced, and you'll hear something about him soon that will do your heart good, sir.'

'Not that he wishes to be baptized himself, David?' said Mr. Heathcote, the tone of his voice showing the satisfaction which the old man could not see in the expression of his face.

'That's it, sir, that's it. He begged me to tell you of his wish, but I told him I would rather he spoke himself. But it's come out. Somehow I can't help bringing out whatever I've got most on my mind when I'm talking with you.'

'This is owing to you, David,' said Mr. Heathcote.

'It's owing to God's blessed Word, sir. I got him to read the Bible, and the Bible has convinced him of the need of Baptism, as the very beginning of religion, the only door that stands open into the true Church of Christ—the channel which the Lord Jesus Christ has Himself made, in order that through it may flow the rivers of His grace from the deep sea of His love. Those were your own words, sir, and I have thought over them many times since, and repeated them to others.'

'And God has blessed your doing so, David.'

'Thanks be to Him for His goodness! He has, sir. But, as I said just now, it has been the blessing of God on His own Word that has brought Andrew Lovell to a right mind concerning Holy Baptism.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

HOLY BAPTISM.

On the next Sunday but one after this conversation between Mr. Heathcote and old David Graham, Harold Moorhouse was very much astonished to see a grown-up man standing at the font amongst those who were about to be baptized.

Such a sight was by no means unusual in the large manufacturing town of which Little Burton formed so populous a part; but Harold had never seen such a thing in his quiet village home, and consequently his mind was as exercised concerning it as it always was concerning anything new.

Of course, all his perplexities came out in questions to his mother, as soon as he found himself alone with her.

'They did not read the same Gospel, mother, that we have when the little babies are baptized.'

And it required but a very few words to explain to him why the Gospel read at the Baptism of Adults should be taken from St. John's account of the visit of Nicodemus, instead of from St. Mark's account of the young children being brought by their mothers to our Lord.

Helen's heart, as often before, filled with happy pride in her little son's intelligence when he observed, after a few minutes' thought:

'Father said one day that the Prayer-book was made for everybody in all sorts of circumstances. I am sure

that is true, mother. For, you see, there are very few grown-up people baptized, and yet there is a service on purpose for them.'

His mother smiled.

'A great many more grown-up people came to be baptized when this service was added to our Prayer-book than there are now. It was added after the Savoy Conference. You know when that was?'

'Yes, mother—in 1662.'

'And consequently after the Commonwealth, Harold, during which time a great many people had not been baptized.'

'And did they make a service expressly on account of this, mother?'

'Not only on this account, Harold. Our Church had in mind other adults besides these, when she introduced into our Book of Common Prayer this "Ministration of Baptism to such as are of riper years and able to answer for themselves," as it is called. We were getting to have large settlements in North America. You have read about them in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and I think you have learned, also, about the plantations in Jamaica, which were added by Oliver Cromwell to the British possessions.'

Yes; Harold said he knew all about them. Fond as he was of study of all kinds, his thoughtful reasoning mind, which already delighted both in the analysis of character and in tracing effect to causes, led him to take a special interest in history.

'Yes, mother,' he replied; 'and I think I see now what you were going to say. I suppose there were lots of unbaptized people in those places?'

'Yes, Harold; and many of these having become converts to the faith, the Church provided this service for their benefit.'

Harold was silent for a little time, evidently deep in thought.

His mother remained silent also. She, too, was thinking —thinking what an intense joy it was to possess a child so completely after her own heart as this one. Fond as her husband was of his boy, his merry, careless little daughter Winifred now formed, if possible, a yet greater element of delight in his daily life. Obliged to devote the greater part of his time to literary and sedentary pursuits, engaged during nearly the whole day in studying with his pupils, writing sermons, preparing papers on scientific subjects for magazines and learned societies, Harold Moorhouse had learned at last, almost as fully as Leonard Prescott, what a rest it was occasionally to shut his study-door upon books and papers, and at such times it had become his chief recreation to seek out Winifred for a good romp in the nursery, or a game of hide-and-seek in the garden.

How often had Helen interrupted her boy on his way to his father with a book in his hand, and his brows bent in the peculiar way which she knew showed some question to be at work in his mind, and said to him :

'Come to me, Harold. I dare say I can explain it to you, and father is tired; he has been so busy all day.'

And what a delight those explanations had been to her, no one but herself knew. To watch that eager countenance, with the light shining through the dark eyes, and every feature alive with intelligence, was the purest happiness to that proud, happy mother. At last, she would say to herself sometimes—at last the dream of her earliest days was realized. No one had ever known how great the disappointment had been when her only brother, on whom her strong affections and high ambitions had centred, proved indeed to be good and gentle and amiable, but averse to the studies which were so dear to herself, caring only for his pencil and his ruler, utterly incapable of ever carrying out the schemes of literary usefulness and success which she had planned for him, or of supplying her with the intellectual sympathy and

companionship for which her soul craved, and which she had early discovered she would not find in her merry, playful sister Ruth.

These had been given to her in her happy marriage, and she had never been wanting in pride either in her husband's attainments in learning, or in his literary reputation.

But her pride in her boy was of a different character, and yet more ensnaring—more of a temptation to her own soul, to that subtle self-love, that self-gratulation which lurks secretly in the inmost recesses of our hearts, finding food whereon to feed itself, even in our most lawful hopes and endeavours. She appreciated and admired her husband's gifts and acquirements, and gloried in every fresh laurel his literary successes won for him, with the most wife-like devotion; but her boy's proficiency seemed a plant of her own planting, every bud of which was a fresh subject of personal satisfaction. If Winifred, merry, giddy, playful Winifred, filled a special place in her father's heart and life, over-taxed as they both now were with labour of brain, Harold, clever, studious, Harold, certainly filled one in his mother's.

Watching his thoughtful face now, she knew a question was coming.

'I suppose that grandpapa did not ask that tall man's god-parents any questions, and that they did not make any promises, because he has come to what father called the age of discretion, when he was talking to the candidates for confirmation, and so he was able to answer for himself?'

'And could understand the solemnity of the vow he was taking in this Holy Sacrament. So that grown-up people, yousee, Harold, are merely required to have god-parents to present them at the font, as Mr. Graham and Mr. Preston and Mrs. Grainger did for that man. They do not require sponsors, who are what your grandfather

called them one day, the "child's mouthpiece," making, in his stead, spiritual promises.'

'Just as people do, mother, when little kings are crowned, and some one takes the coronation oath for them.'

'Exactly so, Harold; or as when in matters of law one looks for worthy trustees to swear certain things for children who are too young to swear for themselves, in order to prevent their losing certain advantages.'

'People don't always choose worthy god-parents, I'm sure,' said Harold. 'Old Mr. Jenkins was godfather to Basil Anstey. That was why he left him all that money; but he was a very bad man, I heard Hannah say.'

'We have nothing to do with Mr. Jenkins, Harold,' replied his mother; 'but unfortunately it is quite true that sponsors are often very improperly selected. Many people who would be very careful in choosing trustworthy persons to take care of their children's worldly affairs are quite careless as to whom they select for spiritual trustees. I dare say you can tell me why this is so, Harold?'

'Because they think so much about their children getting on in the world, and their property not being wasted, mother.'

'And often so little about their souls' good, Harold, and the care that is needed to secure their not losing their heavenly inheritance. For it is not enough to possess an inheritance, is it? We have also to preserve it.'

'Not do as Cousin George has done,' replied Harold—'spend all one's money, and then come to poverty!'

'My little son is somewhat fond of illustrating facts by the example of other people's characters and lives,' his mother answered. 'But, yes, Harold, poor George is a very striking example of what I was saying. He came into a splendid property, and every advantage was given him to enable him to make a good use of it, and let it be a blessing to himself and others. But he has thrown these advantages away; and now those whom he might have been helping on

in life are exerting themselves to save him from ruin. You have known enough of George's history to see what has led to this ruin.'

'Father said he always would have his own way,' said Harold.

'And his parents being dead, there was no one with sufficient authority to prevent his following it. Poor George never learned the duty of obedience either to man or to God.'

'And he was *so* fond of gaiety, was not he? He spent a lot of money in all sorts of pleasure; didn't he, mother?'

'Yes, he did. And why, Harold? He had never learned the duty of renunciation; and I fear he never was instructed in the doctrines of that holy faith which teaches us how to live a good and useful life. So that I pity George more than I blame him. But we may, as I say, learn from his terribly sad circumstances a very useful lesson about our heavenly inheritance—a far more valuable possession, Harold, than any earthly one can ever be, and one still more easily lost. We are made in our Baptism members of Christ and children of God, and heirs of heaven. But this inheritance can be lost, and *will* be lost, unless we seek to preserve it in the only way it can be preserved. I need not tell you what that way is, Harold. You can tell me in the words of the Catechism you repeat every month. God has called us to a state of salvation, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. But we must pray constantly unto Him to give us grace in order that we may do what?'

'Continue in the same unto our life's end, mother!'

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE CATECHISM.

If ever the grace of Holy Baptism was seen to be efficacious, it was manifestly so in the case of Andrew Lovell.

'What's come to Lovell? He's a different man of late,' was said by many who little guessed the cause of the change, or who would have believed in it had they been told.

Little Burton was a large district, and growing larger every year, and its population numbered many hundreds of workmen besides those who worked at 'Abbott's Mills.' Amongst these was Andrew Lovell — old David Graham's friend. He was a Scotchman, whose father had been a soldier in the same regiment with David, and the old man, having discovered this fact, had lost no time in seeking out Andrew through Johnnie Grainger, and thus the acquaintance had been formed which had led to such happy results.

Amongst these happy results was the determined refusal which Andrew Lovell had made to have anything to do with a strike which at this moment had been impending in 'Crowley,' the neighbouring works.

Times were bad, and working people were suffering. The spirit of discontent was abroad, and gained ground every day. For many months the clouds had been gathering, and those who watched them had seen clearly enough that the bursting of the storm was near at hand.

Amongst these watchers was David Graham, always

interested in anything that touched the real interest of others, from the love that he had for all mankind, but especially interested in all that affected trade in Little Burton, from the special love that he bore to many amongst the working people there, and above all from his deep regard for Mr. Abbott, the richest and most influential of the masters in Little Burton district. Therefore did old Graham lend an attentive ear to all that was told him of the disturbances that were now taking place almost daily.

But his ears were opened yet more attentively than usual when one evening the familiar voice of Andrew Lovell made itself heard in his little kitchen wishing him good-evening at an unusually early hour; and Andrew informed him in reply to his question as to how he came to be so early, that he was 'out of work!'

'Then they've struck, up at your place?' exclaimed David, with true regret in his tone: 'in spite of all you've done to keep them from it!'

'Yes,' said Andrew; 'they've struck.'

'And so you have all got to suffer together—those that wanted the strike and those that did not,' said old David gravely.

'Yes,' replied Lovell, 'and some pretty heavily. There's many a poor fellow now will be out of work perhaps for weeks and weeks, because his mates would stand out for what they call their rights, and were on the point of taking them by foul means, since they couldn't get them any other way.'

'It's a sad state of things,' said old David.

'And there seems no way of getting it right,' replied Lovell. 'Master against man, and man against master; and so all come to grief together.'

'As the Bible says it must be, Andrew,' replied the old man, shaking his gray head and turning towards his visitor the wrinkled face which shone with expression, in spite of its

sightless balls. 'As the Bible says it must be. Have not we the best authority for knowing that a house divided against itself can never stand? If the hands and feet won't work with the head, what is to become of the body?'

'That's what our fellows can't see,' said Andrew; 'and what those who are more enlightened and better educated than they are trying to prevent them seeing—that the interest of the masters is really the interest of the men; and it is not possible in the very nature of things for either of them to punish the other without punishing themselves at the same time.'

'As the Bible has it again, Andrew,' interrupted the old man. '"If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another."'

'Which is just what they will all be,' said Andrew. 'It won't be the hands only that will come to ruin if this kind of thing goes on. The masters may keep their heads above water a bit longer, but they will get swamped also sooner or later. When the ladder falls over, as I once heard a gentleman say at a lecture, those on the top rung come down as well as those on the lower; and the greater distance they fall from, the heavier the fall. I can see how it will be at our place. The masters will lose thousands by this strike. They've got, as I know, big orders to execute that they won't be able to get through; so there won't be much of their capital coming back very speedily to them, and by the time they come to some sort of terms with the men, or maybe the men give in on their terms, they won't be able to afford to employ half of them. That's what I've been telling them all along, but they would not listen to me. They have got it into their very souls that they are the injured party, and they just long to get their revenge, and are resolved to have it, at whatever cost to themselves or their wives and families.'

'And yet,' said old David, 'if they are the injured party

—mind, Andrew, my man, I don't say that they *are*—but, supposing such to be the case, what does the Bible say again? "Vengeance is Mine; I will repay." I wonder how many amongst them remember who said these words?'

'Very few, I am afraid, Mr. Graham,' replied Andrew. 'I don't expect many ever heard them.'

'And yet,' the old man added, after a short silence; 'and yet if people only *did* but know them and believe them they would save themselves a world of misery as well as of sin. There's nothing like leaving our cause in God's hands, whatever it may be. Life is a puzzle often, and we only make its difficulties harder by trying to solve them ourselves. We had better leave it all to God.'

'And yet,' said Andrew thoughtfully, 'the Bible says a great deal about the sin of oppression. What with your advice, Mr. Graham, and all this going on around me, and one and another for ever pouring their complaints into my ears, I've studied it rather deeply of late; and it does seem to me that the Bible comes down pretty strong on those who oppress the poor, or who take any unfair advantage of those who are hired to work for them.'

'That's true, Andrew,' exclaimed David eagerly. 'You never said a truer word. From the time of the great lawgiver Moses to the days of the Apostle Saint James, the sacred writers don't hesitate to denounce the sin of oppression. But *who* is to punish for this? Not the oppressed themselves, is it? The punishment will come sure enough. But by whom? Look through your Bible again, Andrew, and you will find that in no single instance where the sin of injustice and oppression is mentioned are those who suffer from it spoken of as connected in any way with the vengeance which this sin will meet with.'

Andrew did not answer for a few moments, and then he said:

'No doubt that's true, Mr. Graham; but flesh is flesh,

and I suppose it's the first feeling of every man's heart to pay back an injury.'

'Of course it is, Andrew, just because, as you say, flesh *is* flesh. But we are not put into this world to follow the dictates of our flesh, are we? At all events, we are not put into the Church of Christ, of which you have just become a member, to follow them. Those that enter that Church are not intended to be the same men afterwards that they were before. Why, Andrew, what does that very first sentence of the Catechism say, which you were telling me the other night your little lad had been so quick to learn? We are made something in our baptism which we never were before, are we not?'

'Members of Christ, and children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven,' replied Andrew thoughtfully.

'And if members of Christ, then bound to be guided by the Head, who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, threatened not, but committed His cause to Him that judgeth righteously. If we are God's children, Andrew, then surely we shall be possessed of a family likeness to the Father, and shall be merciful as He is merciful. If we are heirs of the kingdom of heaven, we are bound to be careful that we do not lose the inheritance through want of fitness to enter into it. No murderer can enter into that heavenly possession; and he that hateth his brother, be he master or man, he that hateth *is* a murderer in the sight of God.'

Again there was a long silence, broken at last by Andrew saying:

'It all seems very true—I believe it *is* true. You know I do, Mr. Graham—you know I have come to see that the Bible is the truth. But, for all that, I don't see how such a system would work.'

'Such a system as what, Andrew?'

'As this system of meekness and forbearance. It seems

to me as if a man must stand up for his rights in this world, be he who he may.'

'If he will stand up in the right way, Andrew. It seems to me as if that way had never had much chance yet. If it only had, I don't believe things would ever have come to the pass they have. We have got a proof of how this better way works here in Little Burton. There are no disturbances in Mr. Abbott's works.'

'There are not many masters like Mr. Abbott, Mr. Graham. I heard some of his men saying so a day or two since. They have only to carry their requests to him, and they will find him ready to give them an attentive hearing.'

'But not always an immediate consent, Andrew. The men have got to listen to the master's view of the matter as well. And it's just because he has got men who *do* listen to him, and are ready to hear reason and come to friendly arrangements, that, as you say, there are no disturbances in his place.'

'I wonder how he gets them into such a desirable condition,' said Andrew.

'I can tell you, Andrew. It has not been done in a day, nor yet in a year. I've seen the working of the whole thing. There's a Bible on that table by you, isn't there? Turn to the last verse of the thirteenth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, and read it to me.'

'"Yet show I unto you a more excellent way,"' repeated the old man, as Lovell concluded the verse. 'By that more excellent way has Mr. Abbott—God bless him—got his people to listen to him; and, more than that, Andrew, to love him; not by domineering over them, and exasperating them, but by considering their interests quite as much, or perhaps a little more than his own; by giving every request made to him his full attention; by feeling that from the very fact of the greater power being on his side, the law of his God obliged the strong to bear the infirmities of the weak; by

consulting the good of the men and their wives and families in every possible way—that's how Mr. Abbott has succeeded where others have failed. His religion is not a mere profession, Andrew. He does not stand up in church every Sunday to declare his belief in the Christian religion, and then go home practically to give the lie to it in his daily life. And the end of this religion is charity. The whole law is summed up in the two verses which command love to God, and, as a consequence, love to our neighbour.'

'There's not much of the latter to be seen about just now,' said Andrew; 'certainly not down at our place. I told my wife only this evening, just before I came away, that the devil is getting it all his own way at present.'

'That may be, Andrew; but it won't be always so if those that are bound to oppose him do their duty. He's very strong, no doubt. No one knows that better than I do. But there's a stronger than he. And He came to this world on purpose to destroy his works. And He *will* destroy them, if only we look to Him to do it, and don't hinder His work by our unbelief and cowardice. You go home and do your part, and get other Christian men to do theirs.'

'There is but a handful of them to do it, and a very small handful, too,' replied Andrew. 'You would see that for yourself if you lived where I do, Mr. Graham. It was bad enough before these troubles began. But it has been a hundred times worse since. There's a fire kindled in the place that won't be easily put out. And for every man like myself, or your friend John Preston—I suppose you know he has been giving lectures down at our place?'

'Of course I do, Andrew; and may God's blessing be on them.'

'I hope it may, Mr. Graham. No doubt it will be, for he is doing his best to stop the mischief that is being done by others. But there's many a man that has lost his life in a good cause, and it would not surprise me a bit if your friend

Preston got into some trouble through this work of his, speaking up as he does, whenever he can get a hearing, against secret societies and tyrannical unions.'

'You don't mean to say that there are any that would injure him?' said the old man anxiously.

'There are some who threaten it, Mr. Graham. I've heard them say so myself, and I would just like you to give him a word of warning.'

'It won't be of any use, I am afraid. If John has made up his mind that a thing is right to do, he'll do it, if he has to die for it. That's the stuff he's made of.'

'Well, you may as well give him a word of warning,' said Andrew. 'Just tell him to be on the look-out and keep to lighted streets, and get a companion or two to walk along with him when he's on his way back to Little Burton, after speaking his mind down in the town yonder. Tell him that from me.'

And Andrew Lovell wished David Graham good-night, leaving the old man with an anxious heart, and carrying an equally heavy one away with him.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CATECHISM.

'It's true,' he said to himself, 'as he turned out of the row of houses in one of which old David Graham lived now so comfortably—a particularly pleasant little house it was, standing back from the others on a sort of knoll raised above the road, which made it more airy and sunny than its neighbours, and gave it, moreover, quite (for Little Burton) a pleasant outlook—'it's true. As I said to Mr. Graham, there's peace and prosperity at Abbott's place; but the devil has got the upper hand down at ours.'

And it *was* true, at all events for the time being. The fear of the Lord seemed to have departed from the place, both as regarded rich and poor.

The 'Crowley Works' were owned by two brothers, named Broadbank, equally rich and equally selfish, worldly, ungodly men, who, caring much for their own bodies, cared not at all for their own souls, nor for the souls or bodies of those by whose labour they acquired the wealth which they spent on every conceivable pomp and vanity of this wicked world, and on the gratification, to the utmost possible extent, of all the sinful lusts of the flesh.

What wonder was it, then, if things had been going, as Andrew Lovell truly said, from bad to worse, until at last they had reached a point of evil which threatened ruin both to employer and to employed?

In the minds of those ungodly masters one principle alone had reigned: how to amass wealth most quickly and successfully, and, in order to do this, how to get most out of those whom they employed, and to give least in return.

As a natural consequence of this, the guiding principle in the minds of the employed had become how to render the smallest possible amount of labour for the highest possible amount of payment that could, by artifice or by complaint, be extorted from their employers.

Therefore was it that, whilst Mr. Abbott and his work-people, carrying on together similar works, under avowedly the same rules and regulations, were living in the most friendly relation, realizing their mutual dependence, and each according to the other the rights which that relation demanded, the Messrs. Crowley and their hands, within a distance of a few miles, were living as open enemies.

Naturally, Andrew Lovell's sympathy was with the men. He was one of them himself, and it was not long since he had been, like most of them, discontented, revengeful, ready to take up the weapons in his own defence, as soon as he should see what weapons it would be best to take. Had it not been for his intimacy with his father's former comrade, the blind old pensioner, he might have been so still. But he was not. A great change had come over him —the greatest change that can come over any man. He had come out of darkness into light.

And in that light he saw things in a totally new aspect. The evil did not seem at all less. On the contrary, it seemed greater than before. But now he saw its cause, and this evening, after leaving David Graham's house, he seemed to have gained a fresh insight into the only true remedy, of which he had already had some glimpses.

'The good old man is right,' he said, as he walked thoughtfully home, turning out of the dimly-lighted back

streets of the district into yet gloomier slums, which boasted no light at all, save an occasional twinkle from some attic-window, shining from a tallow candle, by which sat some weary seamstress stitching on into the night in order to gain a few pence to help in the heavy family need, caused by the present distress.

This distress was not weighing as heavily personally on Andrew Lovell as on others. His wife had been a valued servant in the same family for many years, and had had a good 'bit of money' put by when they married, and since their marriage he had belonged to a provident society, and being an excellent workman, and having only two children to provide for, had saved 'a tidy little sum.' If, since coming into his present employment, he had also belonged to a trade's union, it was not from any benefit he hoped to derive from it—for his clear head had very soon shown him that the expenses incurred by the society would effectually prevent any money being made out of it—but because he had been led to consider it as a point of honour to join in any combination to support the cause of the men against that of the masters.

Now, however, through the influence of his father's old friend, confirmed by the reasoning of John Preston, his eyes had been opened to see that, even supposing that there was a certain amount of injustice and tyranny in the conduct of some employers, it was but exchanging one bondage for another to submit to the absolute despotism of a trade's union committee. Consequently he had been waiting for some time for a good opportunity to drop his subscription to the union to which he belonged, as old Mr. Graham had advised him to do, and it was not long before such an opportunity offered itself. A meeting had been held to pass certain resolutions. Not one quarter of the men who attended it were in favour of these resolutions; but the committee ordered that they should be adopted, and so they were.

That evening Andrew Lovell took his name off the list of subscribers.

'It seems to me very much the same,' he said to a fellow-operative, who was disposed to follow his example, but lacked the needful courage, 'whether you give up your will to a couple of men like the masters, or to half a dozen men like that committee.'

'We elected them to be our committee,' replied the other. 'They are only so by our choice.'

'I don't see that that makes much difference,' replied Andrew, 'if, when they are elected, they refuse to follow the voice of the majority, and decide upon measures against our wishes. Mr. Preston told us the other night that he once heard it said that if a man had to wear a heavy chain round his neck, it would not give him much comfort to know he had helped to make it. And I think that's true. Indeed, I believe it makes the weight heavier. For my part, I should only feel what a fool I had been to put my fingers to a bit of work that proved such a yoke to myself in the long run. There's nothing like liberty, was the cry at the meeting, and all the time they were talking about liberty they were wanting to put the chains tighter on us. Depend upon it, Mr. Preston spoke the truth the other night. If a man wants to be free, he must have one Master, and that is his God, and one set of Rules and Regulations, and that is his Bible.'

'I'm not sure that you're not right,' replied his companion, 'though I would not like to speak out about it quite as plain as you do, Lovell; and I'd have my fears about what might be the consequence if I were to break off from the union just now. Mr. Preston is a daring kind of man. I would not care to be in his shoes at this moment, after having heard the things said about him that I have heard myself; and I would advise you to be careful, Lovell.'

'Oh, no fear for me!' replied Andrew. 'I'm not Mr. John Preston. I do feel a little uneasy about him, I own, and I mean to let him know what a feeling he has stirred up against himself.'

All this had taken place about a week ago. Ever since then it had been in Andrew Lovell's mind to give or send a warning to Mr. John Preston, who, according to the opinion of the Crowley workmen, had been 'leaving his own business at Little Burton to come and meddle with theirs.'

To-night he had given the warning, and was feeling glad to have done so as he walked home through the slums that divided the district of Little Burton from the neighbouring one of Crowley.

It was a miserable night, raining and blowing hard. Large pools of water filled the streets, and every gutter was overflowing. Andrew regretted having remained so long talking to Mr. Graham, for he feared his wife would be uneasy at his being out so late; but no other fear than this was in his mind as, pulling the collar of his coat around his ears, he came out of the last of these streets into an open space that stood just at the extremity of the Little Burton district. It had been country only two years ago, when Lovell first came to work in the Crowley factories. His children had gathered daisies and buttercups in the fields which were now cut up into lots for building houses, some of which were already in course of erection, whilst wooden boards fenced in other spaces allotted for the same purpose.

It was not a pleasant place for a half-mile walk on such a night as this, but no thought save of his own discomfort and his wife's probable uneasiness was in Andrew Lovell's mind as he went along, splashing his way through the mud and mire, which were nearly ankle-deep, until, as he was passing a row of black palings, a heavy hand seized him suddenly from behind, without his having been aware of any approaching footstep.

Andrew was no coward, albeit his disposition was the very reverse of combative; but a natural feeling of fear took possession of him as he found himself in the grasp of a man nearly twice his own size, and perceived, moreover, other forms looming through the darkness—no doubt his companions. Who these companions were it would have been quite impossible to guess, for they were as undefined as the black posts of the opening from which they had evidently issued; but Andrew felt an immediate certainty concerning the identity of the big fellow who held him in so firm a grasp. Although his fur cap was so tightly drawn over his eyes, and the collar of his coat so pulled up over his nose and mouth that, even had the darkness been less thick than it was, it would have been almost impossible to discern a feature of his face, Andrew felt that such a huge hand as that which held him, and such a tall, stout figure as that which towered above him, belonged to no one round these parts but Ben Atkins—'Burly Ben,' as he was called.

'Who are you?' he asked; 'and what right have you to lay hold of me in this way? Let me go at once.'

'Who I am is of no consequence to you,' replied the man; and, in spite of an attempt to disguise it, added to its being already disguised by more free indulgence in drink than was usual to 'Burly Ben,' Andrew was as sure of the voice as he was of the hand. 'Who I am don't matter to you or anyone. As to what right I have to stop a cowardly fellow like you, and teach him a bit of his duty, we won't argue about that now. Might is right, at all events, at this moment. And as to letting you go, no, no, friend Lovell, at least, not till you swear that you'll never set your foot again within the four walls of any place where that scoundrel Preston is holding forth. And besides this oath, there's another you've got to take before you go back to the bosom of your affectionate family, and that is, that you'll not go over to Abbott's place and take work there, as folks say you mean to do.

So now, Andrew Lovell, are you ready to swear to both these things?'

'No, I am not,' said Andrew. 'I will not swear to either of them, for I have made up my mind to do both one and the other.'

'Then we have made up our mind to give you our blessing on them to-night. We've been getting ready for it this hour or two, and we're almost sick of waiting in this pleasant weather while you were enjoying your weekly prayer-meeting, or whatever it is that carries you to that old hypocritical friend of yours every Thursday evening. But we have not waited for nothing.'

And, tightening his grasp round Andrew's slight form, he bade his companions, not one of whom had spoken a word, 'come on.'

There was a short whispered parley amongst them, and then Andrew heard one say something about the old pond close by, and there not being water enough to drown anyone, though it would be a nice place for a cold bath on such a night as this.

'That's it, my man,' replied Ben. 'You take his feet and I'll take his body, and he shall have, as I say, our blessing on his new course of life. He's fond of water, I hear. He has been and gone and got baptized, I'm told, up at the district church. We'll give him a second experience of it here, in Crowley Pond!'

And in another instant the men had borne him to the margin of the now shallow pond, where, however, Andrew knew there was every probability, notwithstanding its shallowness, of his life being sacrificed by sinking into the deep mire.

'Here, leave him to me!' exclaimed Ben. 'I can manage alone, now we've got him so far.'

And lifting Andrew in his arms almost as easily as though he had been a child, the great fellow would have deposited

him in the pond, and left him there, had not his foot, rendered somewhat less steady than usual by the drink he had been taking, slipped over a stone, and sent both him and his burden heavily to the ground together.

In a moment Burly Ben was on his feet again, and ready once more to seize Andrew, whom he expected to rise as quickly, for there was neither water nor mud in the spot where they fell, but only rough stones made slippery by the rain.

But Andrew showed no signs of movement.

'What's come to him?' exclaimed Ben. 'He is not dead, surely?'

And his voice sounded very differently from what it had done a few minutes before. He was sober enough now, and evidently frightened.

'I'm afraid he is,' exclaimed one of the men, who had come forward and was kneeling on the stones beside him.

'Here, strike a light, some of you, can't you?' exclaimed Ben. 'Has no fool got a match about him?' he added, his big hands trembling far too much to allow of his feeling in his own pocket for his own match-box.

Someone produced a match and an end of candle, and by its light they saw that Andrew lay utterly motionless—his head on the sharp stone on which it had fallen.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CATECHISM.

'You've done for him, Ben, I believe!' exclaimed the man. 'And what's to be done now the Lord knows.'

Certainly Ben did not; and for some minutes there was perfect silence—not a sound to be heard save the splashing of the rain-drops in the pools.

The first voice came from a man who had not much liked the job from the beginning, and had only been induced to join in it by a dread of Ben. He had kept pretty well in the background all along, and it was from him that the words came:

'It was Ben's doing from first to last. He got us to come, and when the ducking was proposed he agreed at once, and was going to put him in.'

Ben turned fiercely round on him, forgetting the need of caution as he raised his voice from the whisper in which the few words that had been exchanged had been uttered, and said:

'I know that as well as you do, Peter Brewster. I've done it, and I must bear the consequences. What they are going to be no one can tell. I shall have to hang for it, I suppose. Anyhow, I'm off now. There's a train starts at midnight for London. I'm off by that—no need where. If they can find me, then they will. You fellows can swear, when the body's found, that you'd no more to do with

it than the magistrates themselves. It can't be found till the morning, and by that time I'll be miles away from this.'

No one interrupted him while he was speaking, but, as he ended, the man who had helped him to drag Andrew to the pond, and who had a good deal more brains than Burly Ben, if he had a good deal less body, said quietly :

'It's nonsense to talk like that, Ben. You don't know what the police are if you think that a man is going to be found dead in this way, and a fellow like you is going to disappear from the neighbourhood and not be caught and brought back before he knows where he is. A man your size is not easily hid, or disguised either.'

'No,' exclaimed the fourth man of the party, the only one who as yet had not spoken, 'Dickenson is right. That won't do. We must just go home to our houses and bide there. And my advice is to leave this poor wretch where he is. There'll be a hue and cry all over the place in an hour or two. And, as it's known he goes over to Abbott's Mills on Thursday evenings, it's here they'll come to look for him. Ten to one they'll think it was an accident. He lost his way on such a pitch-dark night as this, and fell over a stone trying to find it. The sooner we get out of this ourselves the better.'

Again there was a short silence, and then Dickenson said :

'We won't do anything of the sort ! To begin with, who's to say he won't live ? It don't look much like it, certainly ; but he may be only stunned, and if we leave him here to die, then it's murder ! I don't know if you want that on your mind ; but I don't want it on mine. So I shall just go and give information at the police-station ; and I advise you to come along with me. Let us say we had been at the Half Moon—that can be proved easily enough—and were on our way home when we heard a cry coming from here, and found

this poor wretch just as he is. If he's dead, as I verily believe, well, it can't be helped; and dead men tell no tales. If he gets over it, and tells his story, well, let's take our chance. Who's to say that we were the men that set on him? I don't believe he could have recognised one of us.'

'Unless it was me,' said Burly Ben, with an inward resolution to get out of the way as soon as he could, notwithstanding all Dickenson might say to the contrary; at all events, at the first word of suspicion of Andrew having come to his death by foul play—for in his heart he had not a doubt that he was injured beyond recovery.

By the advice of all, he and Peter Brewster walked back to their homes at Crowley together, not exchanging a single word the whole way, which was perhaps just as well for Peter Brewster.

Dickenson and the other man went back to the police-station at Little Burton, and gave their information as they had arranged to do.

The result of it was that at daybreak next morning, just as Mrs. Andrew Lovell was putting on her bonnet to go in search of the husband who never before had remained a night from his home without her knowing where he was, she received a visit from a policeman, who came to tell her that he was lying at the Little Burton Infirmary.

'Is he given to drink?' inquired the policeman, as they walked there together, the poor woman almost running in order to keep up with the quick step of the policeman, yet much too anxious herself to reach her journey's end to ask him to slacken his pace on her account.

'Drink!' she exclaimed; 'he's the soberest man in Crowley. The manager can testify to that.'

'It seems strange,' said the policeman; 'that pond is ever such a bit off the road. If once he got near it, it was natural enough he should have slipped over. The stones

were so slimy, we could scarcely keep our footing there, though we had lights to guide us. But you say he knows the road well; goes there every Thursday evening? Once in it, I don't see why he should have got out of it.'

'It was an awful dark night,' said Mrs. Lovell, who knew well what sort of weather it was, having spent the greater part of it opening and shutting her window to peer out into the pelting rain.

Had it not been for her six-weeks-old baby, and for the conviction she felt that there was some good reason for her husband remaining at Mr. Graham's so late, she would not have allowed even those few hours to pass without going in search of him through the driving wind and heavy rain.

'Old Mr. Graham has been taken ill,' she said to herself, 'and Andrew thinks I shall have gone to bed and to sleep, and will know nothing about his not having come back until he tells me of it himself. He knows I never sit up for him when he's there, and I should not have done it if it had not been for the weather. I should just have put his shoes ready for him, and gone to bed and to sleep if it had not been for the awful rain, which made me wish to keep up a good fire, and have something hot ready for him when he came in.'

'No need to tell me what the night was like,' replied the constable. 'I never was out in such rain before.' And then he asked, as if continuing some train of thought he had been previously carrying on in his mind: 'There's no one that has got any grudge against him, I suppose; no one that would be wanting to do him a bad turn?'

'My Andrew!' she exclaimed; 'I should think not. He has not got an enemy in the world.'

'Then if he don't drink, and there's no one that would have given him a help to his end, it must, no doubt, have been an accident.'

Mrs. Lovell only caught the meaning of three words in this sentence.

'To his end!' she exclaimed. 'Oh, sir! you don't mean there's *no* hope?'

The kind-hearted constable was sorry to have spoken out so plainly, and yet perhaps it was all for the best.

'It's a bad blow, I am afraid, missus,' he replied. 'The doctors said it was, when they sent for you. But while there's life there's hope, you know; and everything will be done for him that can be done. They were having a hot bed prepared, and getting this and the other ready for him, almost before we were well inside the house. Let's hope we'll find a change when we get back.'

'If he could only speak to me!' she said to herself, as she sat beside the bed on which he lay motionless, listening to the laborious breathing, and every painful respiration going straight to her heart; watching the dilated pupils of the eyes in which there was no recognition of her, whom from the first day of his married life until now he had never met without a kindly look. 'If he could only speak to me—only knew me!'

And she got up from her seat beside him, and prepared to return to her baby at home with a heart very near breaking.

A gentle hand was laid on hers, and a voice of truest sympathy said:

'You must come into our house first, and have some dinner. Besides, I have some toys put up for your little boy, to amuse him when you are away. We must not forget the little children in our sorrow, must we?'

And Mrs. Heathcote led Mrs. Lovell down the street leading from the Infirmary to the Vicarage, and up into the nursery, where Hannah had a tempting little dinner ready for her.

The new Infirmary in Little Burton district, built chiefly

by Mr. Abbott's wealth, and named St. Margaret's, after his own invalid wife, was now almost the chief interest in Mrs. Heathcote's life. She had no longer the strength of other days to toil up and down the steep stone streets of Little Burton district, and to mount one flight of stairs after another to reach its many attics; but she could spend hours upon hours in the sick wards of St. Margaret's Infirmary, where her presence was almost as that of an angel in its power to comfort and to heal.

At sight of the food, young Mrs. Lovell burst into tears.

'I'll take the basket for the children, ma'am,' she said, smiling through her tears as she thought of the delight the toys and cakes would be to them; 'but, indeed, I could not eat any dinner. It's more than good of you, but I could not taste food.'

'Oh yes, you can,' said Mrs. Heathcote. 'Hannah will have her dinner with you, and then I will walk a little part of the way home. You'll get back all the more quickly for being a wise woman and taking some food.'

And when she returned a quarter of an hour later, she found the poor creature talking to Hannah quite calmly about her little Andrew's intelligence and the baby's pretty ways, repeating to her what her husband had told old Mr. Graham of the quickness with which the boy had learnt the first sentences of the Church Catechism.

But when, a few minutes later, she and Mrs. Heathcote passed together beneath the windows of the Infirmary ward where her husband lay, the clouds gathered over her face as thickly as before, and she said:

'Ah, who knows if ever I shall hear my boy repeat those sentences to his father again! Scarcely a day passed that he did not make him say them, and no words can tell what a happiness it was to me. For you see, ma'am, my parents were religious people, and I was well brought up, and when

I was a young thing I was fond enough of going to church and Sunday-school. They used to think me rather a serious girl until I took up with Andrew, and then he did not care for such things, and that put them out of my mind.'

'You did not think, then,' said Mrs. Heathcote, with a smile, in which there was too much sympathy to make a sore heart any the sorer, 'you did not think, then, of the promise you had made to keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same *all* the days of your life, or ask for God's grace to enable you to do so?'

'Indeed, ma'am, I did not. I did not even know that Andrew had never been baptized until after we were married, though, of course, I knew he was not a religious man. But I did not think of that then. The thought of him put everything else out of my mind. But I have been very unhappy about it since, especially when the children were born, and I had some trouble to get them brought to church. But lately I've been so happy, oh, so happy! Mr. Graham does not know how many times I've prayed to God to bless him for all the good he has brought to me and mine. And now it's all trouble again.'

'But not *such* trouble,' said Mrs. Heathcote. 'Only think, dear Mrs. Lovell, how much heavier this trouble would have been if it had come upon you a year ago! I am sure those very words that you say your husband had been teaching your little son must come home to your very soul when you think of him. You must surely thank God heartily for having "called him to a state of salvation through Jesus Christ" before this happened.'

'I do, ma'am, I do! It's hard enough to bear as it is, but I think it would send me out of my mind altogether if I did not believe his soul was safe, if I did not feel sure that, if we never go back any more to our happy life together in this world, we shall meet again in the next. And, God helping me, I will bring up his children to meet him there,

if He will only give me grace to teach them to keep God's commandments.'

Evidently Mrs. Lovell had no hope whatever of her husband's recovery, and Mrs. Heathcote did not seek to inspire her with any, for she herself felt none.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CATECHISM.

Mrs. Lovell was sitting in her kitchen with her children on the second Sunday after her husband's accident.

Though it was but a small room, with only one window, and the light from that shaded by the wall of a factory just opposite, her tidy ways and capable hands gave it a brighter, smarter look than many a room in a pleasanter situation. Not a thing in it but was in its place, and nothing but was as clean as hands could make it.

There had been no going to church that morning for Mrs. Lovell, and no going to school for little Andrew; for the child was too young to walk to Little Burton school, and Sunday-schools did not exist at Crowley.

Had Andrew been at home, he would have remained with the baby in the morning whilst little Andy went with his mother to church, and in the evening she would have stayed at home and he would have had his turn at the church-going, which was now the pleasure of the week to them both. But this morning she had to stay at home. The neighbours had been very good ever since the accident in minding her children for her, that she might be at the Infirmary as much as possible, some for the sake of a few pence, but many more refusing all payment for the sake of the pleasure it was to themselves to do a kindness to others. But Sunday, when the husbands were at home from work,

and the children did not go to school, was a busy day for wives and mothers, and all she could expect was that two or three kind neighbours should take turns in looking after her children for four or five hours in the afternoon.

This morning, having a little extra leisure at command, she had made her kitchen look even more 'spick and span' than usual, and she herself and the children were as neat and tidy as they could be, when, to her surprise, as she sat quietly with them, the baby sleeping in its cradle, and little Andrew intent upon his 'catechism lesson,' a knock was heard at the door: a loud, peremptory double knock. Andrew dropped his book, and was about to reply to it, when his mother detained him.

'It's not for us, Andy,' she said. 'No one comes here for us knocking like that. And it can't be for Widow Alcock either. It must be a mistake.'

The knock was repeated, more loudly this time, and very impatiently; and, with a 'Stop here, Andy!' Mrs. Lovell went herself to the door.

Scarcely could she believe the evidence of her own eyes when she saw the portly person of the elder Mr. Broadbank standing before her.

She knew him perfectly by sight, for Mr. Broadbank was a very regular church-goer, and every Sunday was to be seen in his pew, with his wife and daughters beside him in their furs and feathers and velvets.

But nowhere save at church had Mrs. Lovell ever set her eyes either on him or on any of his family, and it almost seemed as though her hearing also must be misleading her, when he asked, in a tone the pomposity of which seemed to say that he himself fully realized his condescension in being there, if 'Mrs. Lovell lived here?'

'Yes, sir,' she said. 'I am Mrs. Lovell.'

She did not ask him to walk in until he said:

'I want to say a few words to you.'

Then, begging him politely to enter, she set a chair for him, and bid Andrew take his book into the bedroom and stop there quietly.

She had no time to collect her thoughts sufficiently to form any idea as to what could have brought Mr. Broadbank to Lower Garnett's Court; but she connected his visit in some way or other with Andrew's accident, and her heart was beating so violently that it would have been a relief to her if that gentleman had bid her take a seat.

But he did not, so she remained standing. Not a shade of colour in her face, and every limb trembling so violently that she held the back of the chair by which she stood to support herself. But none of this was perceived by Mr. Broadbank.

'Your husband met with a bad accident some ten days ago,' he said.

'Yes, sir.'

'He is not likely to recover, I understand,' he continued, 'I don't want any particulars of the accident. I am in possession of them all.'

This was as well, for had he not been, Mrs. Lovell would have found it utterly impossible to supply them.

'I have come myself to make inquiries concerning what may have gone before the accident,' he continued. 'My manager, Mr. Hartley, wished to come and see you on the matter; but I preferred doing so myself, and I thought it better to come here than to send for you.'

Something in Mr. Broadbank's tone and manner prevented Mrs. Lovell from feeling the least disposed to thank him for having done so.

'Have you no reason whatever to imagine that your husband did *not* fall into Crowley Old Pond by accident? No reason to suspect that there was any foul play?'

It was surprising to see how many shades paler a pale face could grow. Mrs. Lovell's was deadly white as she answered:

'Oh no, sir. The policeman said something to me about it the morning after the accident, and I told him my husband had not an enemy in the world.'

'Not to your knowledge, perhaps. Possibly he had some that you were not aware of. He had been acting contrary to the measures decided on by the union to which he belonged, I understand.'

'Had he?' she said.

For it was one of the rules of the society that nothing that passed within the walls of their place of meeting was to be repeated without. Not having full confidence in the discretion of womankind, wives had not been made an exception to this rule.

'Yes, he had,' said Mr. Broadbank. 'I am told that the committee of that society had forbidden any of their members to attend Mr. John Preston's meetings at the Town Hall, with other regulations to which your husband refused to consent.'

'I don't know anything that went on at the meetings,' replied Mrs. Lovell, who was growing very sick and faint; 'but my husband had a great opinion of Mr. Preston, and often went to hear him; so, perhaps, that was one reason he gave up going to the union meetings.'

'He had given them up, then?'

'Yes, sir. They are on Thursday evenings, but he has not gone lately. He spends every Thursday evening now with an old friend at Little Burton.'

'And no doubt this made a good many of his former companions very angry. Do you know a man they call "Burly Ben"?'

'Oh yes, sir, very well.'

'Your husband and he were great friends, were they not?'

'I don't think one would call them friends, but they were very intimate. Ben Atkins came from the same place as my husband. They had known each other all their lives.'

'And had they had any quarrel about this union to which they both belonged?'

'My husband was not a man to quarrel, sir. I heard him say to Ben one night that he always meant to spend every Thursday evening at Little Burton.'

'And what did Ben Atkins say in reply? Did this information seem to make him angry?'

'I don't know, sir. They were just going out of the house when he said so.'

'But what led to his making this remark?' inquired Mr. Broadbank.

'I don't know that either, sir; I was putting my children to bed in the inner room while they were talking together here, and this was all I heard them say.'

'The woman is a perfect fool,' thought Mr. Broadbank. And he rose from his chair with an inward oath, which he felt more than half-disposed to utter aloud.

In his own home he was constantly cursing the 'jabbering' and 'repeating' which he declared led his womankind often to make remarks which he considered prejudicial to his own interests.

But never had he felt as irritated by this indiscretion as he did now by Mrs. Lovell's reticence or ignorance; for he did not feel at all sure in his mind which it was that made her thus close about her husband's affairs.

'Then you don't suspect that this accident was caused by any foul play?' he said.

'Oh no, sir; God forbid.'

'Then I do, Mrs. Lovell. And what's more; I feel pretty sure of it.'

And without waiting to see what effect this information might produce, Mr. Broadbank let himself out of the house, and returned to his home, where his wife and daughters, dressed in even more than their usual finery, in consideration of its being Sunday, were wondering at the most unusual want

of punctuality which was allowing an elaborate hot luncheon to grow cold.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Lovell sank into the chair, the back of which she had been holding for so long, two words still sounding in her ears—'foul play!'

Was it possible that her Andrew, always so good and kind to all, should have come to his death through the cruelty of others?

If the idea had never suggested itself to her mind before, she had received it now in all its fulness of horror and misery.

Little Andrew, hearing the voices cease, and the house-door slam, knew that the visitor, whose appearance had so greatly astonished him, had taken his departure, and hastened to return to the kitchen. But Mrs. Lovell could find no voice to answer his inquiry as to why the gentleman had come.

At last the baby woke with a cry, and this roused her. She lifted him from his cradle, and as he nestled close to her she burst into tears.

'Is father worse, mother?' asked Andrew. 'Did the gentleman come to tell you? Is he dead, mother?'

And he began to cry so violently that she roused herself from her own grief to comfort his.

'No, Andrew; father is not dead, but he is very, very ill. I must go to him now; I can't wait for dinner. Run and ask Mrs. Thomas if she can come at once. Say I have had bad news, and must go to Little Burton.'

Mrs. Thomas came directly. She and the other neighbours had been wondering for the last half-hour as to what could possibly have brought Mr. Broadbank, 'his very own self,' to Lower Garnett Court.

But Mrs. Thomas was not more successful in procuring the information she desired than Mr. Broadbank had been.

'Oh, I can't tell you,' said Mrs. Lovell; 'I don't know. Yes, Andrew is very bad. Mr. Broadbank says he will surely die. I must go to him now—you'll mind the children till I get back, won't you?'

The singular state of excitement in which she found her usually quiet little neighbour considerably increased Mrs. Thomas's curiosity concerning the cause of Mr. Broadbank's visit. But, as she said afterwards, she 'could get nothing out of her.' So she gave the desired promise, and five minutes afterwards Mrs. Lovell was on her way to St. Margaret's Infirmary.

'Your husband is better,' said the kind-hearted porter who opened the gate.

He was an old servant of Mr. Abbott's, who had a pleasant word for everyone in trouble — and few people came to that gate who were not in some kind of trouble— but his pleasantest words were always to this poor wife, whose gentle ways and words had won his heart.

'Better!' she exclaimed.

'Yes; he has had much less pain, the nurse tells me, ever since last night, and has had some quiet sleep.'

'And is perfectly conscious still?'

'Perfectly; but, of course, you must keep him very quiet —not that you're likely to talk much to him. You ain't one of the talking sort.'

Which was very true. Yet, as she sat beside her husband's bed that day, listening to all he had to say to her, and finding him so much better than even the porter's account of him had led her to expect, there was one question which she longed, yet did not dare, to put to him.

At length he himself led straight to the subject.

'How do people think I came by this accident?' he said. 'Did they imagine I was drunk, that I could get so far wrong in my road home?'

Mrs. Lovell's heart stood still for an instant, then beat so

violently that she was obliged to wait for a few moments before she could answer.

'The policeman asked me if you were sober. But no one else would have asked such a question about you, Andrew dear. Everyone round our place knows you too well.'

There was another pause of several minutes; then Andrew said:

'Well, Mary, my girl, if anyone makes inquiries of you—they are likely to do so when they hear that I have got my senses back all right—say that this *was* an accident.'

'Yes, Andrew.'

Mrs. Lovell was more bewildered than ever. She had never known her husband swerve from the truth in the least. If it was *not* an accident, he would not have said that it was. Yet, if it was, why should he imagine that any doubt should be raised on the matter? Why should this be the first thought in his mind as he recovered consciousness, and these the very first words he should say to her?

Nothing more was said for some time. Andrew lay in the state of half-sleep, half-prostration, only known to those just rallying from unconsciousness, and his wife feared to excite him by saying a single word.

'I should like to recover,' he said at length, 'for your sake, Mary, and for the sake of the little ones.'

'But you will recover now, Andrew,' she replied; 'the danger is over.'

'Not over,' he said. 'I asked the doctor to tell the exact truth, and he would not; so I asked Mr. Heathcote, and he did. He always does. I shall not die, as they thought at first, from the concussion of the brain; but the spine is injured. They don't yet know how it will be with that.'

There was a trembling of the pale hands that held his in their grasp, but Mrs. Lovell did not shed a tear, or say a word—she could find none to comfort, and she would not utter any to grieve.

'Do you remember my last lesson to Andy,' he said, 'on the Church Catechism?'

'Perfectly.'

'I am in that state of salvation, Mary; and so are you, and the children. Let what will come, I feel safe. I have thought a deal about it since I've recovered consciousness. My head is so weak yet, I can scarcely keep two ideas in it at the same time. Perhaps that is why this one keeps for ever in my mind. Those words come back over and over again. All last night, Mary, all this morning, I have been thanking my heavenly Father, *our* heavenly Father, thanking Him heartily, heartily, that He did not allow this accident to happen until, in His mercy, He had called me to a state of salvation, through Jesus Christ our Saviour.'

Very little more passed between them until the nurse came to send Mrs. Lovell away.

Then, as she lingered beside his bed to wish him good-bye until to-morrow, he said:

'You are making Andy go on with his Catechism?'

'Oh yes; he is trying how much of it he can learn before you come home.'

'That's right, only don't let him, and don't you yourself, depend too much on my coming home; it's well not to make disappointment for one's self by being too hopeful. But whether I ever come back or not to our earthly home, there's a better one that we are sure to come to, quite sure, Mary, if we keep a hold of the grace given to us, and continue in it unto our life's end.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CATECHISM.

Winifred Moorhouse stood at the drawing-room window of her grandfather's Vicarage, watching idly the group of girls who, with shawls drawn over their heads, were hurrying down the steep street on their way from their different factories home to dinner. Her brother Harold sat in another window of the same room, so deeply absorbed in his own book that he did not perceive that his sister, who had been busy with hers a quarter of an hour ago, had allowed it to drop upon the floor.

He was much too seriously engaged in the subject he was studying to be thinking of anything else. If he had given a thought to Winifred it would have been to feel thankful that at length she had become quiet, and had ceased to disturb him with the idle remarks which had been annoying him for nearly an hour.

At last she astonished him immensely, and succeeded in drawing his attention away from his book by suddenly asking the very unexpected question :

'What does "orally" mean, Harry?'

'"Orally!"' he exclaimed; 'why it means something taught by word of mouth—not written. Whatever makes you ask?'

'Because grandpapa says I seem only to learn orally. I suppose, then, that means that I can't learn out of books,

and I'm sure that's true: I hate them. I have been trying all this time to learn that lesson grandmamma gave me.'

'And have given it up and thrown your book on the floor? And next Sunday you won't be able to answer a question that grandfather asks you at the catechizing—and that will be a real shame for you, Winnie, before all those little factory-children!'

'If we can't answer at the catechizing, grandpapa always tells the answer, and goes over it and explains it until we understand it. I like the catechizing very well.'

'That's why grandfather said you only learned "orally." Oral teaching is teaching by word of mouth; and grandpapa makes his teaching so easy, and tells such lots of stories to explain things, that you listen. But he does that for the sake of the poor children. He says many of them can't even read. But it's a shame for you, Winnie, when you can read, and father and mother take such trouble with you, not to try and learn your lessons.'

'Well, I can't!—I hate books! I've tried to learn this lesson, and it's too dull. I've given it up.'

'Well, at all events, let me learn mine.'

And Harold returned to his book, and thought no more of Winifred's question until that afternoon, when he repeated it to his favourite friend in his grandfather's parish—old David Graham.

The old man's love for his 'dear Miss Helen's' children deepened every day. They were the joy of his declining years. When they were at Little Burton he delighted in their daily visits, and when they left he found his chief happiness in recalling almost every word that they had said to him.

Harold's love of his studies, and proficiency in them, afforded the old pensioner fully as much satisfaction as they gave his own grandparents. But he troubled himself a good

deal more about Winifred's idleness and openly avowed aversion to books than did either Mr. or Mrs. Heathcote.

'She is a bright little being,' they would say to each other, speaking of the contrast between her and Harold, 'with plenty of mother-wit and practical ability. She will never be fond of books like her mother, but she has her own gifts, and we must hope God will give her grace to turn them to account.'

But old David would say, not often to others, but constantly to himself:

'It is pity she is such a giddy little maid. There's Master Harold going away to school next month, and what a loss it will be to his dear mother! Why, it has been the chief pleasure of her life to teach him, and have him to talk to. She gets as much companionship out of him as if he were a grown-up man; and she must value it all the more from Mr. Moorhouse being so much engaged with his books and his pupils. It will be a regular blank in her life when he goes; and I am afraid Miss Winnie won't help to fill it.'

Something of this kind the old man said to Harold himself that afternoon; and this it was that led to the boy's telling him what had passed that morning.

A bond of sympathy was created now between grave old David Graham and giddy little Winifred Moorhouse.

'And she likes the catechising, does she?' he asked. 'Well, and so do I, Master Harold. Before I lost my sight I did not value it one half as much as I do now.'

'But I don't suppose you ever hear anything there that you did not know before, Mr. Graham; grandpapa makes it all so easy.'

'Oh yes I do, Master Harold; and, besides, your dear grandpapa has got a way of putting old things in such a manner that they seem new, and in bringing the deepest lessons home to one's heart out of the very simplest facts — things that one has known all one's life. Besides, one is

always learning. I never knew till now what you have been saying about "oral instruction."'

'Not that it meant teaching by word of mouth, Mr. Graham?'

'Well, I did know that, Master Harold; and that catechizing was a way of giving instruction by asking questions and getting the answers. But I never knew what you have just told me about its coming from the Greek, and meaning 'sound.' It's a great thing to be as well taught as you have been by your good father, young master.'

'It was grandpapa that taught me this, Mr. Graham. He gives me something to learn every morning while father and mother are away; and this morning it was about catechizing. I had to look out all the places in the Greek Testament where the word occurs, and see the different translations given in our English version.'

'Do you remember them, Master Harold?' exclaimed the old man, with the eagerness of one who esteemed, as he most truly did, every word of the Bible more than his daily food.

'Why, of course I do, Mr. Graham. I only learned them this morning. It would not do to forget what one learns quite so quickly as that.'

'Are you tired of your books by this time, sir? or would you mind going back to them for a little for the sake of an old man who has no chance now of getting any teaching out of books but what others will help him to find. I would dearly like to hear those verses.'

'I am sure I shall be very glad to read them to you,' said Harold, who inherited his mother's innate love of imparting instruction, and who never had any opportunity of exercising it, save upon that most unsatisfactory subject, his careless little sister.

And opening the large Bible that lay, as ever, close beside the old man, he read the different verses in English which he had that morning learned in Greek for his grandfather.

'I see,' said the old man; 'I see. When St. Luke tells Theophilus in this first chapter of his Gospel that he is writing to him that he may know the certainty of those things wherein he has been instructed, the word means "catechized," or "taught by word of mouth." And so with regard to Apollos—I always think of your dear grandpapa, when I read in that eighteenth chapter of the Acts about Apollos being an eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures, and fervent in spirit—and the instruction he had received had been by catechizing, had it?'

'So this verse seems to say, and the same word is used in the twenty-first chapter of Acts, too, Mr. Graham.'

'Where it would be more correctly rendered "carefully told,"' said an unexpected voice, and Harold turned round to see his grandfather standing behind him in the doorway, where, indeed, he had been the greater part of the conversation, and, had there been time to do so, would gladly have remained yet longer, so pleasant to his eyes and his heart was the picture before him.

The old man was sitting exactly opposite to him, his reverend white head bent in rapt attention, while his long snowy beard rested on his knees, and his sightless eyes were turned towards Harold, their lack of vision more than atoned for by the eager interest which animated every other feature, while he listened to the boy, who, seated on a low chair opposite to him, spoke with the eager pleasure always excited by an attentive listener.

A pleasanter picture could scarcely have been supplied. It had suggested several others to Mr. Heathcote's mind as he stood silently watching it. He thought of Paul in his youth learning at the feet of Gamaliel the 'perfect manner of the law of his fathers'—of the child Samuel holding sacred and solemn converse with the blind and aged Eli; but the picture that impressed his mind most vividly was of a yet more sacred nature, that of the

Lord Himself—a boy like other boys in all things save one, a boy perhaps very like this boy, who was so singularly gifted with grace and wisdom beyond his years—sitting in the midst of the doctors hearing them and asking them questions.

And there was no want of reverence in the thought, for it was the Lord's own Spirit that dwelt in this, His young disciple, making him to increase in wisdom as he increased in stature, and in favour with God and man.

'Oh, grandpapa!' the boy exclaimed; 'I never heard you come in. How long have you been standing there?'

'Long enough to hear how well you remember what you learn, my boy. But you must run away now, and let me take your place in chatting to Mr. Graham. You know you have to carry my note to Andrews' Mill. Winifred is waiting for you in Evans' shop with grandmamma.'

'May I take Rollo with me, grandpapa?' he asked, as he fondled the dog, who was playing round him with delight.

Mr. Heathcote hesitated.

'Will you take good care of him, Harold? Andrews' Mill is rather a crowded place, and Rollo is a very independent individual, and given to stray.'

'I won't let him out of my sight, grandpapa. I'll bring him home quite safe if you'll only trust him to me.'

And Mr. Heathcote consented.

It was a happy thing that Harold's requests were always so reasonable, for Mr. Heathcote would have found it hard to refuse them.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE CATECHISM.

THERE never was a boy like him!' exclaimed the old man, as the door of the house closed, and Harold ran down the street, whistling to Rollo to follow him.

And blind though he was, old David knew perfectly that the 'twinkle' he used to love to see was shining in 'the minister's' eyes by the tone in which he answered:

'Do you know, David, I remember your saying those very words years ago of another lad, and it's very strange that you should have said them to me to-day, of all days in the year; for I have come expressly to bring you news of him.'

'Good news, I am sure!' exclaimed the old man, who required no mentioning of names to know that 'the minister' spoke of Charlie Preston, of whom he had never once heard any news that was not good since he had gone away to India years ago to fill a post to which he had been appointed solely through his own talent as an engineer.

'I think we may say he has made his fortune,' replied Mr. Heathcote.

'Then his discovery has succeeded?' said the old man. His machine works well?'

'And he has been advised to take out a patent,' replied the clergyman, 'and is already receiving offers to purchase it.'

'Thank God!' exclaimed old David, 'so be it that his pros-

perity in this world does not injure his progress to the next. There's always a fear of that, sir.'

'Always, David. We must hope that God will preserve him from it.'

'And what does his father say to it, sir?'

'Just what one would have expected John Preston to say, David. He took it as quietly as he takes everything. There's no disturbing John's equilibrium, but it's easy for those who know him to see how full of thankfulness he is. As for his mother——'

'She is off her head, no doubt, sir. I fancy I see her, between crying and laughing, and scarcely knowing what she is about. Well, it is wonderful. To think of that poor little puny chap, that used to sit all day long with his lame leg under him on the window-seat in his father's kitchen, making all sorts of queer things out of bits of wood with an old knife—to think of his taking out a patent for a great invention! Well, he owes it all to you, sir, every bit of it, by God's blessing.'

'Begging your pardon, David, I think he owes it far more to you, by the same blessing; and his father thinks so too. It was by his wish that I came to tell you this morning; for he has some very particular business to attend to at the office, and he was afraid that you would get to hear the news from someone else—Mrs. Preston will have told the whole neighbourhood before long—and that would have distressed John greatly. But he will come himself to see you this evening, and bring Charlie's letter. He offered it to me to bring, but I felt he ought to have the pleasure of reading it to you himself. It is a beautiful letter.'

'I'm sure of it, sir, I'm sure of it.'

And once more old David repeated the assertion Mr. Heathcote remembered his making so many years ago, that 'there never was a lad like him,' adding, however, this time, 'at least, not till now; for that dear laddie that has just gone

out is such another. In gifts, I mean, sir, and in loving-heartedness; for, of course, in nature there's a vast difference between them. Charlie was all for fun and frolic, and a bit of mischief was a sore temptation to him; but Master Harold is most too sensible and thoughtful for his years.'

'I am afraid he is, David.'

'There's no need to be afraid, sir, is there? It's his nature; and Miss Winifred, she makes up for it, if he is a bit too serious for so young a boy.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Heathcote; 'it is all very well while he is at home, David. But, you see, he is going to school.'

'So he tells me, sir, in a month.'

'Mr. and Mrs. Moorhouse have fixed on a school, and are now making arrangements for his going. I am afraid he may not get on so well as we should wish in school-life. There's no fear about his not getting on in his lessons. But a boy must be something more than a scholar. He must make his mark in the playground as well.'

'He'll never do anything that is not noble and straightforward, sir.'

'Never, David. The boy has as true a fear of God before his eyes, as true a dread of offending Him, as anyone I know. My fear is that he will not care for play and games as a boy ought to care, if he is to be really happy and healthy at school, and make himself loved by his companions.'

'That will come, sir, that will come with the need of it,' said David. 'One has only to hear him talk to see that he has plenty of spirit in him.'

'He certainly had as a little boy,' replied his grandfather, 'when his heart was set upon being a soldier. But his books have changed the current of his ideas of late. He dreams more now of being a scholar.'

'He *does* love learning,' said the old man. 'You heard all he was telling me when you came in.'

'A great part of it, David. There is no catechizing in Mr. Moorhouse's parish, and this always seems to have given zest to the interest the children take in it here.'

'There don't seem many children to catechize there,' said David; 'only a hundred and fifty souls in the whole parish. It seems like nothing.'

'It is as much as Mr. Moorhouse can take charge of, David, with the care of his pupils and all his literary work. It was just because this college living was such a small one that he accepted it. His population certainly is a contrast to ours.'

'Where we have hundreds of children in church every Sunday afternoon. That catechizing service is my great delight, sir, as I was telling Master Harold just now. It's a capital custom, sir.'

'And a very old one, David, old enough to satisfy you. Explanations of the Lord's Prayer and the Creed used to be given in this way many years ago. So far back as the year 1538 we find that the curates of our churches were ordered to repeat sentences of the Creed to the people, explaining them and asking questions about them, until they saw that they were perfectly understood, just as we do now on Sunday afternoons.'

'And yet there are folks who call such things new-fangled customs, through ignorance, sir.'

'Through ignorance, as you say, David. This Catechism was composed for our Church and inserted in our Prayer-book more than three hundred years ago. And it used to be explained publicly then, just as it is now, and parents and masters were ordered to send their children and their apprentices to be catechized upon it.'

'I wish more parents and masters in our town followed out that order now, sir; for it often seems, when I am at the afternoon service, as if the lads and lasses would know enough to keep them straight all their lives, if only they had

grace given to act upon the teaching given them in their Catechism. If they only followed that, they would know how to fulfil their duty both to their God and to their neighbour.'

'They would indeed, David; for the first four of these commandments which they repeat so often sum up in very few words the whole of their duty towards their God.'

'Those four were written on the first of the two tables of stone delivered by God to Moses on Mount Sinai, and the last six on the second table, were they not, sir?'

'So some people suppose, David; but we cannot feel sure about this, and it is not of very much consequence.'

'No, sir; only such things always interest me. But, as you say, the important thing is to have them written on our hearts.'

'The first four teach us how to live as regards our God, owning no God but Him, and keeping our hearts as free of idols as the Jews of old were bound to do.'

'And as it is just as hard for us to do, sir.'

'Or harder, David. Such objects of worship as money, or the love of praise, or the idolatrous love of our fellow-creatures are a much more subtle temptation than the worship of those idolatrous objects to which the people of Israel had grown accustomed in the land of Egypt.'

'Where they worshipped the sun and the moon and stars,' said old David.

'And much grosser objects than these, David. One can easily understand the feeling that led those ignorant people of old to perform religious services to the heavenly bodies which were of such power in the sustenance and fertilization of the earth, and to pay honour to that great river, the Nile, which they looked upon as a "life-giving father." But these poor benighted souls were equally ready to worship all sorts of animals—the black calf, and the bull, and the goat, and the ram, and other creatures.'

'It does seem strange ignorance,' replied David; 'and yet you say, very truly, sir, that we are ready to fall into the same sin if left to the folly of our own hearts.'

'Forgetting continually, David, in one way or another, that God is a jealous God, allowing no rival, refusing to share His glory with any other, be it the most lovely form of hidden heart devotion or the very coarsest object of an ignorant idolatry. He will have the heart, David, in all sincerity; and those who give Him anything but heart worship, take His Name in vain every time they utter it, just as truly as those who use it in blasphemy or in perjury.'

'It is a solemn thought, sir,' said David.

'Very solemn, David. It is one that is very often in my mind, often at this very catechizing that we have been talking about. Some of our young people are painfully giddy, and grieve me to the soul by the careless way in which they take upon their lips the most solemn assertions and promises. You often pray for them, David?'

'Indeed I do, sir; and thank God for them too, sir. For there's more to make me thankful in this place, sir, than to make me sorrowful. The bread cast upon the waters comes back after many days. But I remember the time when there was no Sunday teaching at all in this place, when the Sunday was just like other days, except that folks did not go to work on that day, at least not to their usual work in the mills and shops. But this only gave them more time for profaning the Lord's Day in all sorts of ways. As for "hallowing" it, or consecrating to God's service the day which He had expressly made to be a blessing, there was little thought of that. In a few quiet rooms, and in some few Christian hearts, God's day was kept holy even in that time; but there was no public honouring of it, as we have now, thank God!'

'Thank God, you may well say, David; for, look at it in what light you may, this keeping holy of the Sabbath,

ordained by God Himself from the very beginning of the world, is the greatest blessing, as a merciful means of securing rest to man and beast, as a sign of God's everlasting covenant with His people, as giving us the opportunity of spiritual communion with God, and as a type of the heavenly rest prepared for us in heaven. We have, indeed, cause to bless God for our Sundays.'

'As no one knows better than I do, sir; for, though all days are more or less Sabbaths to me now, there was a time, and a long time too, when Sunday was the only day that I could find real leisure to give to God, or was not too weary in body truly to enjoy spiritual advantages. This commandment is the last of those first four which teach man his duty to his God, but it will never be the least in old David Graham's estimation.'

'We cannot talk more now, David,' said Mr. Heathcote, who knew that the old man would gladly have continued for hours to talk of these subjects. 'I had not meant to stay so long, but when once you and I get into conversation, we are apt to forget the time.'

'I think, sir, I forget everything when once I am talking to you. Even Charlie had gone out of my mind for the moment.'

CHAPTER XXX.

THE CATECHISM.

Old David lighted his pipe as quickly and safely as though his eyes had guided his hands to the match-box on the little shelf beside him, and went off into one of the long reveries which were his chief occupation now. Rather should we say, perhaps, into one of his long trains of thought, for reveries are idle things, and have but little purpose in them, and there were very few of David Graham's thoughts which might not rather have been called reflections, so full were they of gratitude, of thankful recollection of the past, of practical wisdom for the present, and trust and faith for the future.

Now they turned naturally on Charlie Preston, and the news 'the minister' had just brought concerning him.

'And it is not always,' he said to himself, 'that God's promises are so literally fulfilled as they have been to that dear lad. Not one thing fails which the Lord has ever said. Sooner or later all happens according to His good promise. No fear of His forgetting or changing His mind, as men are apt to do. But often one has to wait for the good things, however sure we may be that they will come. It's very rare that the fulfilment comes as early in life as it has come to my little laddie. There were two of God's commandments that seemed written on that boy's heart—the keeping of the Sabbath and the duty he owed to his parents. Nothing ever

kept him away from church, and he would fret his dear heart if he could not get all the family to be as regular as he was. There was always enough to tempt him to turn his foot away from the right path, and to prevent his doing the Lord's pleasure on His holy day, but it was ever a delight to him, and honourable. I think I see him now, sitting opposite to me, reading God's Word, or some good book, not doing his own pleasure or speaking his own words, though I am sure there never was a lad who enjoyed both these things more on other days. And now, even in this world and before he has got out of his youth, the Lord is making him to ride upon the high places of the earth. We thought him almost a gentleman when he got this post. But now to think of his having made a name for himself, and being likely to make a fortune! And such a good son as he was to his father and mother! Joseph himself and Jephthah's daughter were not more obedient to their parents, or more careful of them than he was. He followed the fifth commandment, if ever a boy did, and the fulfilment of the promise has followed very early in his life. It has been well with him.'

'And now,' continued the old man, speaking aloud, as was his frequent custom—it seemed to make the long hours of solitude less lonely thus to hold converse with himself—'now my dear Miss Helen's laddie is giving fair promise of being just such another for fearing the Lord.'

And passing from thought to prayer, as was indeed his wont, the old man laid his pipe aside, and placing his elbows on his knees, bent his white head low upon his hands, and sent up his soul in prayers and thanksgivings to God. Not one amongst Charlie Preston's nearest friends, scarcely even his parents, could feel truer gratitude to God for the temporal blessings so unexpectedly given to him. Yet did not thanksgiving for these take the chief place in old David Graham's prayers to-day. Far more earnest were his

petitions that he might be preserved by grace from forgetting his God, in the new and strange circumstances into which His providence had led him. It was His power, and might, that had enabled him to get this wealth. God had been with him from his very youth, in filling him with wisdom and knowledge to devise cunning works in all manner of workmanship. With all his heart David prayed that now, when the silver and the gold and all that he had were multiplied, his soul might not be lifted up, and he might not forget the Lord his God. And from prayer for Charlie Preston he passed to prayer for Harold Moorhouse; and the time had seemed to him but short, so full had his thoughts been of these two 'lads,' the elder and the younger, the higher in this world's rank and the lower, both so dear to him, when, two hours afterwards, Mrs. Grainger returned from her superintendence of the parish laundry, and they sat down together to supper.

The widow's tongue was full of Charlie Preston's grand success. The news had spread over the whole neighbourhood by this time, and people had talked of little else. The women over their tubs, the hands at the mills, the small shopkeepers who carried on business in the streets, all who had had a moment to spend in talking had given it to Charlie Preston, some with hearty sympathy and satisfaction, others with envy and a little murmuring at the luck which seemed continually to come to some folks, and constantly to fail themselves, all with much wonder and interest.

Each of these feelings had some place in Mrs. Grainger's mind, and influenced the tone of her conversation as she took her seat at the supper-table, after seeing the old man comfortably placed in his, opposite to her, and began again upon the subject, perhaps for the twentieth time since morning.

'His father is coming down this evening,' she said 'to read you Charlie's letter.'

The old man remarked that he already knew this, adding, that 'the minister' said it was 'a beautiful letter.'

'No doubt,' said Mrs. Grainger; 'it seems to me as though it must be easy to write beautifully when one gets just what one wants, and more than one wants, or than one has ever had any reason to expect.'

The tone of her voice, never at the best of times a very cheerful one, was quite enough to tell the old friend who knew her so well that Widow Grainger's old enemy was roused from an unusually long sleep within her breast, and was stirring himself up secretly. We all have our besetting sins, and what is more, we probably all carry them with us to the grave, and only part from them on the threshold of eternal rest from sin, although long warfare with them, and constant watchfulness against their very first assaults, may perhaps have kept their existence and our struggles with them a secret from all save ourselves.

But there was no reproof in old David's voice. He had not lived so long with Widow Grainger without knowing the reality of her religion, and that to lead her back into the sunshine would be a far wiser way of dealing with her than to upbraid her for remaining even a moment in the gloom of discontent or envy.

'We all have our mercies,' he said. 'We can never be grateful enough for them. That is what I have been thinking, sitting here these two hours, ever since the minister brought me this good news.'

Widow Grainger fixed her eyes on the old man's face, sightless and withered, yet radiant with happiness and thankfulness, and the tone of her voice was altered as she said:

'I was thinking, you see, Mr. Graham, of my Johnnie, and what it would have been to me if such a piece of good luck as this had come to him. It might have, if he had had Charlie Preston's chances. He was a clever lad always. It seems to me it was Charlie's lameness that brought him his

good fortune. It made everyone take interest in him, and look after him specially—good, kind people, I mean, and people that had the power as well as the heart to help him on, like Mr. Heathcote and Mr. Abbott, and now Mr. Prescott; for it's Mr. Prescott most of all that has been the making of him, giving him that introduction to the engineering firm at Birmingham. If he had not been lame, I expect he would have got on like other sharp, steady lads, no better and no worse. But his lame leg has been the making of him.'

'In God's good providence, Mrs. Grainger. That's the way often. What seems our greatest trial proves our chief blessing in the end—

> '"The bud may have a bitter taste,
> But sweet will be the flower."

Those are words in one of your favourite hymns, Mrs. Grainger, and I think you've had experience of their truth for yourself.'

'Yes,' she said, 'and I hope I'm not altogether ungrateful, Mr. Graham; 'but I always seem to feel somehow as if my boy did not get as well off as the others; I mean the rest of that little set he has gone with from the beginning of the work here.'

'Miss Ruthie's boys,' said the old man.

'The choir boys,' said Mrs. Grainger, 'the lads that first sang in the choir of the old Iron Church, and that were the first to be confirmed.'

Old David Graham's thoughts travelled back in an instant of time to those early days of Church work in Little Burton district, such a small work as it had been then, such a large work as it had now become.

'Aye,' he said, 'I remember that time well. Hour after hour I spend in thinking of it. And it seems to me as if I saw those lads now just as they were then, those three

especially. They were always first and foremost in everything, in the choir and the Bible-classes, and the Band of Hope. Such clever boys as they were, and good-looking laddies too, though they were as unlike in appearance as ever they could be. I see them now, I do. Charlie Preston with his curly fair head and his roguish blue eyes, never without a twinkle in them, and his little face, so white and funny, yet always ready to be turned up to mine with a sharp look of questioning intelligence, or the archest expression of fun, as he limped along beside me; and Richard Taylor, with his curly head, just as curly, only that it was dark instead of yellow, and his black eyes that had a look in them as though he were afraid of nothing, and his tall, straight figure and confident manner; and your Johnnie, *our* Johnnie, always so quiet and retiring, with his thoughtful brown eyes, and pale face, and earnest anxious look.'

The old man paused, out of breath with the eagerness with which he had been recounting these, his favourite reminiscences; and Widow Grainger said:

'Too quiet and retiring for this world, it seems to me—standing aside while others push forward and take the prize.'

The tone in which she spoke carried a new thought to David's mind. There was some fresh cause of grievance within the widow's heart; and, turning towards her, as though he could see the anxiety which he felt sure was on her face, he said:

'There's something the matter, my friend! You've heard some other news than this about Charlie Preston—something that has gone nearer to your heart?'

'Only that folks say that Minnie Davis is engaged to a young fellow at Uxminster.'

There was no need to say more; old David knew perfectly what would be the effect of this news on the heart which was dearer to them both than any other, though never a word had been breathed on the subject by either of them.

'It will be a sore trial to our lad, I fear,' he said at last.

'I *know* it will, Mr. Graham. I have not watched my boy's face, morning, noon and night, all his life long, without knowing something of what was going on in his mind It will go nigh to breaking his heart. So full of hope, too, as I believe it has been of late.'

'Since he went into Mr. Prescott's office,' replied David, 'I have observed how cheerful he has been. He has seen her constantly, no doubt.'

'And learned to love her more than ever, and to feel hopes of winning her. Ever since she went away from Little Burton, and Richard Taylor went back to America, our Johnnie has been a different man. Everyone knew, though no one ever said so, that she had refused Dick; and that was the true cause, first of her going off to live with Mrs. Prescott, and then of his return to America. I knew it quite well, and so did Johnnie. The sunshine came into the lad's face as I had never seen it there before, and he has been getting brighter and brighter every day. I never shall forget his look or his voice when he came in one evening and told me how glad Minnie seemed that he was coming to Uxminster, and that they would meet frequently.'

'They were like brother and sister always,' said the old man.

'But Johnnie's feeling for her was no brother's love.'

'No,' said Mr. Graham, 'I am afraid not. There's a long time I have felt that it was not. And I had been hoping, too, that all would have gone well with him and Minnie. Many's the time I've sat here of late, after the lad had been over to see us, so full of cheerful talk, in every bit of which there was always so much about Minnie. Many a time I've sat here fancying what a delight it would be to me to see these two married. And now you say she is engaged to another man. Well, well! the Lord knows best. But I've got to say again, as I've said hundreds of times before,

His ways are not our ways, nor His thoughts our thoughts.'

And that day, which the news of Charlie's success had caused to begin in such bright sunshine to old David Graham, closed in clouds of disappointment on account of Johnnie Grainger. Yet, behind the clouds he knew the sun was still shining, the sun of God's love ; and still his faith led him to believe that out of what seemed evil, good must surely come to those who prayed and waited.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CATECHISM.

Meanwhile, Harold Moorhouse, turning his head continually to keep his eye on the dog, hurried along to Evans' shop to fetch his little sister, and take her with him to carry the note for his grandfather to Crowley.

'You have Rollo with you, I see!' was his grandmother's somewhat surprised remark as he came into the shop, the dog at his heels.

'Yes; grandpapa said I might take him.'

'Mind you take care of him, then,' said Mrs. Heathcote. 'Rollo is not always easy to manage.'

'Oh, I can manage him, grandmamma, no fear; he knows me well enough.'

And, with another whistle to the dog, the two children started on their walk—a very different two miles walk from any they ever took at home. They agreed that they should not like such walks always, but they did not mind them occasionally; and if there were no pleasant lanes, or blossoming hedges, or sweet singing birds, at Little Burton, such as they loved in their own village, but only dull streets, one exactly like the other in the better parts, and in the poorer, dirty courts and alleys, and everywhere ugly mills, and a smell of mingled smoke and oil, still there were a great many things to be seen at Little Burton which they never saw at home, and, moreover, a great deal of useful information to

be gained. Not that this afforded Winifred much satisfaction, but to Harold it was a very real enjoyment. To-day nothing escaped his eyes or ears in the streets or along the murky river's bank, thick with mud, a striking contrast to their own pure river at home, until they reached Crowley Mills. The porter asked them to step in while waiting for the answer to the note, but Harold declined. Rollo was in no condition to enter the office, and he could not leave him outside.

So the children stood waiting at the door, and were well pleased when a little girl, who, in spite of her extreme youth, was evidently possessed with a spirit of discernment, which led her to put implicit faith in Rollo's good disposition, approached him fearlessly, and offered him the remainder of a cake she was eating.

Not so well pleased were they, however, when, an instant after, a low growl was heard from another and very much bigger dog, who had been lying unperceived beneath the wall of the baker's shop close by, and before Harold had had time to tell Rollo to drop the cake and call him to his side, the two dogs were engaged in fierce combat. In vain did the boy now call off Rollo. His blood was up and he was deaf to all command or entreaty.

In an agony of fright lest Rollo's huge assailant, which was pretty nearly twice his size, should do some serious injury to his grandfather's faithful friend and companion, the boy rushed between them and strove to part them by force.

'Let them alone; let them alone, Harold! You'll be killed; you'll be killed!' Winifred cried wildly.

And her screams, united to those of the baker's little daughter, bringing that individual himself to the scene of action, he repeated the same entreaty.

But Harold was as deaf to remonstrance or command as were the creatures themselves, and would not relinquish the struggle until, his arm thrust into the strange dog's very

throat, he came off victorious, and seeing the latter carried off by his master, turned to Rollo with mingled words of scolding and caressing.

Not till then did he himself feel the pain of a wound which the dog's teeth had made in his leg or perceive how deep it was, and not till then did Winifred see how ghastly white he looked.

A few people had gathered together, and these, seeing the boy was hurt, pressed round him with rough characteristic kindness.

'You've been hurt, young master. Will you come in to my place and see to it.'

But Harold declined their offer, and bidding Rollo keep to heel, and telling Winifred to be quiet and not to cry, for there was nothing to cry about, he walked away as well as the pain in his leg, now growing very acute, would allow him to do, in the opposite direction from which they had come.

'Is that a quicker way home?' asked Winifred.

'No; it's longer. But there are no shops the other way.'

'But you don't want to go to any shops, surely, when you're so badly hurt. Oh, Harold; do let us get home as quickly as we can!'

'I want to go to a chemist's, Winnie, and I know there's one in a street down this way.'

'To get something for your leg?' said Winnie.

And she said no more, for there was a look on her brother's face which Winifred knew meant that he was thinking of something, and did not want to talk. But he was so pale, and evidently walked with so much difficulty, that she was very thankful when they entered the chemist's shop, this time taking Rollo with them—poor Rollo, who was so meek and quiet, that it seemed as though he was fully aware that he had been the means of bringing the children into some trouble, and was very penitent.

'You are ill?' said the chemist, before Harold had said a word. 'You're faint?'

'No,' he replied; 'but I've hurt my leg. A dog has bitten me.' And showing the wound, he added: 'I want you to burn it with caustic.'

The chemist, greatly surprised at this request, as, indeed, he had been before in less degree by the children's appearance, came forward and examined the wound.

'That's a strange request for a young gentleman of your age to make on your own responsibility, young sir. I should advise your going home and getting your parents to send for the doctor. That's a nasty wound.'

'I am not at home,' said Harold, 'and my parents are away, and I am on a visit to my grandfather, and I don't want anyone to hear anything about it. And I know it ought to be burnt with caustic. I don't care how much it hurts if you will only do it for me. You may cut the flesh away if you like.'

The chemist could not refrain from smiling.

'You are an uncommonly plucky young gentleman,' he said, 'to bear such a wound as that so bravely, to say nothing of wanting to have it burnt and cut straight away, without knowing who's going to do it, or what you will suffer in the doing. But things can't be done like that. If I mistake not you must be Mr. Heathcote's grandson.'

Harold did not deny his identity; but he renewed his entreaties, to which the chemist turned an altogether deaf ear, replying by ringing a bell.

'Call a cab,' he said to the young man who answered the summons, 'and go with this young gentleman and lady to Little Burton Vicarage. The young gentleman has been badly bit in the leg by Fowler's brute of a dog. I'll have him shot this very day. You'll not leave him until you see him safely into Mr. Heathcote's charge.'

The man obeyed; and before long the cab appeared, and

Harold, whose leg the chemist had dressed, got into it with Winifred.

To the children's satisfaction the chemist's assistant mounted the box beside the cabman.

'I'm so glad that man made you go home and tell grandpapa. I think it would have been very wrong not to have told him,' said Winifred, her judgment for once proving better than her brother's.

'There will be such a fuss,' Harold answered, 'and mother is coming back to-night, and will be so frightened. It may make her ill again, and I knew that if it was burned there would not be much danger.'

'Danger of what, Harold?'

The boy hesitated.

'Of it's getting bad. I believe it would have healed directly, if the chemist would only have cut away the flesh, or burnt it, and given me something to dress it with.'

'I don't think it's right to hide *anything* from father and mother,' said Winifred very timidly, for this was the first time in all her little life that she had ever ventured to differ from her brother in opinion.

Harold made no reply, and there was silence for some time between the children.

Then, a sudden recollection flashing across the little girl's mind, she said:

'Harold——' and stopped suddenly.

'Well, what?' he asked. But Winifred seemed now disinclined to speak. 'What is it?' he asked, somewhat irritably.

And Winifred, afraid to keep silence, and never able to say anything except the simple truth, and that in the most straightforward way, replied:

'I was only going to ask about the gamekeeper at home that was bitten by a dog and——'

'Died?' said Harold.

'Yes,' she said; 'I had forgotten him.'

'I had not,' said Harold. 'I heard father say that he might not have died if he had been attended to at once, and the wound had been burnt.'

'Will they burn yours?' said Winnie, very anxiously.

'I suppose so; but mother will know about it now, and be anxious, and the doctor said she was to have no anxiety—not the least. And there need not have been any.'

Winifred said no more, but her little heart was very heavy with anxiety, her first anxiety, until, a short time after her return to the Vicarage and the visit of the doctor, who had been summoned at once, her grandmother came to tell her that there was no cause to be uneasy either for Harold or her mother—explaining to her the very different circumstances of the accident to the gamekeeper, who had been bitten by a dog which was afterwards found to be mad, and who had neglected the wound until it was too late for anything to be done towards saving his life.

And then, to her great satisfaction, her grandmother told her how right and wise she had been in urging Harold not to conceal the accident.

'Which he would have done if it had not been for the chemist, grandmamma. He is so brave.'

'Wonderfully brave, Winnie. The doctor was quite astonished to see how much pain he could bear.'

'He never would have told, grannie, however bad it had been. He would have borne anything rather than make mother uneasy. He does *so* love mother!'

'More than Winifred does?' said Mrs. Heathcote, smiling.

'Yes, grannie, I think so. Because, you see, though I do love mother, and father too, *very* much, I don't think I could ever do *as* much to please them as Harold does, or bear as much for their sakes as he would—that they might not be grieved or troubled, you know, grannie.'

'And this is how love shows itself, you think, Winnie?'

'Grandpapa said so on Sunday at the catechizing, grannie. I think so, too, only . . .'

'Only what, my darling?'

'Only it is not always easy, grannie.'

'Indeed it is *not*, Winnie. *Why* is it not?'

'Because, grannie, though we *do* want to be very obedient, we want so many other things besides.'

'What sort of things, Winnie?'

Winnie was thoughtful for a few minutes, seeking for words in which to express her idea, and then she said:

'We want to please our parents, grannie, but we want to please ourselves too.'

Mrs. Heathcote put her arm round the child and drew her closely to her.

'And it depends upon which we want to please most whether we obey them or whether we follow our own will. So that, you see, our obedience depends upon the amount of our love. You remember the text grandpapa gave you to learn on Sunday at the catechizing?'

'Oh yes, grannie! "If ye love Me, keep My commandments."'

'And there is another text in the same chapter, Winnie, that says, "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me;" and in the next chapter Jesus says to His disciples, "Ye are My friends if ye do whatsoever I command you." Not one thing, Winnie, but *all* things. Obedience is the only proof of love. It is just the same with our love and honour for our Father in heaven as for our parents on earth. The more we love them, the more we shall seek to please them.'

Winifred laid her head on her grandmother's shoulder, and, looking straight into her eyes with her honest, open gaze, said:

'Then I am *sure* Harold loves father and mother more

than I do, for he tries much more to please them—especially mother. He does love mother *very, very* much.'

'And therefore thinks more of her than of himself, Winnie, as we have seen to-day. He made a mistake in wishing to hide his accident, but it was a mistake made in love, from fear of frightening mother, or giving her pain.'

At this moment Hannah appeared at the door, a trying moment always to Winnie. She rose from her seat beside her grandmother, and held up her face to be kissed.

'Good-night, grannie,' she said.

Not another word did she say about stopping up till her parents came back, urgent as her entreaties had been to be allowed to do so, notwithstanding all her grandmother's assurances that they would like to find her in bed and asleep at that late hour of the night.

But, although she had yielded obedience to the first part of this wish, the latter proved quite beyond her own control.

Ten o'clock had struck from half a dozen clocks in the immediate vicinity of Little Burton Vicarage; the twilight which still prevailed when Hannah had gone away had deepened into darkness; the lights in the factories had all gone out, and even the dogs had stopped barking, and the men and boys had ceased to talk in the streets below, and there had not been a sound of wheels since the last train had come in nearly two hours ago—and still Winifred lay awake thinking.

'If Harold had been killed by that dog, mother would have had only me,' she thought; 'and I am not good like Harold. He never gives her anything but pleasure. I heard father say so to Mr. Abbott. He could not have said so of me, for I give her a lot of trouble. On Sunday she was unhappy because I was so inattentive in church in the morning. I know I was. I could not think of anything except those little girls in front of me who were so smartly dressed, and in the afternoon I was vexed and cross because

grandfather would not let me go for a walk, as we do at home. And Harold never gives father any trouble over his lessons, and I give him *so* much; and I *hate* so to do needlework—I can't keep my eyes from looking at the clock and wishing the time would go quicker. What *would* mother have done if any harm had come to Harold, and she had been left only with me?'

Poor little Winifred! This thought weighed heavily on her soul, and kept her eyes wide awake until the half-dozen clocks began to strike again, some all at once, others in very rapid succession, and the rumbling of wheels was heard once more along the streets, and she knew the last train had come in. A few minutes after, and one pair of wheels rattled up to the door, and she sat up in bed and listened. First there was quiet talking in the hall, then sounds of footsteps going towards Harold's room, then a long stillness. And then footsteps coming towards her own room, and she was in her mother's arms, her father standing by, shading the candle with his hand, until he heard her mother say:

'What! not asleep, Winnie?'

'No, mother. I could not go to sleep till you came home. I want so much to say something to you—to you and father too. I am *so* sorry I have *always* been such a troublesome girl. Hannah called me so one day to nurse, and I was very angry; but I know now it was quite true, and I want to be *quite* different. I never shall be clever like Harold, but I want to be good and obedient like him.'

And Winifred burst into tears.

'My darling,' said Mrs. Moorhouse softly—Mr. Moorhouse, standing silently by, thinking the child should not have been left alone, not knowing in what a very different state of mind her grandmother had seen her go off to bed—'my darling little Winifred, you have been frightened by

Harold's accident. You have been too excited to go to sleep. You are my darling little Winifred—and father's darling too.'

'Yes, mother, I know I am; but I have *not* been good. I *know* I have not. And all this while I have been thinking about Harold, and how good *he* is. And, oh! what *would* you have done if the dog had killed him, and you had been left with only me?'

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE CATECHISM.

A FORTNIGHT later, and Andrew Lovell lay on a couch beside the open window in another, a smaller, but still pleasanter, ward in St. Margaret's Infirmary, awaiting his wife's usual afternoon visit, and wondering somewhat anxiously what could be delaying her. He was so much better now, that there was no fear of nurses coming to disturb the visits which were such a delight both to him and Mary. The length of these visits now depended only on the amount of time that Mrs. Lovell could afford to give to them, and lately she had been able to remain many hours daily; for Mrs. Heathcote had provided her with such a supply of needlework, that she could afford to spend whole afternoons at the Infirmary and pay a girl to take charge of the children at home.

Two o'clock was her usual time for her visit to St. Margaret's, but the clock on the mantelpiece never reached that hour without finding her established beside her husband's couch. Such moments were too precious for her to allow one of them to be lost. This afternoon, however, Andrew had been watching the minute-hand for nearly half an hour, and his pale face was growing flushed with anxiety before the light step he knew so well was heard on the stair, and the pleasant face he loved so dearly was beside him, calm and smiling, as usual, but with a shade of care upon it

which Andrew's eyes detected at once, although it was so faint.

'You are very late,' he said.

'I was afraid you would be anxious,' she replied, with a laugh, behind which the quick ear caught the slight tone of constraint as readily as the quick eye had detected the vanishing shadow behind the present smile. 'That is what comes of being always so punctual. I have been so vexed to have been delayed.'

'Not by anything amiss at home?' asked Andrew. 'Nothing wrong with the children?'

'Oh no; they are as well and bright as can be.'

'But something has troubled you, Mary, and you must tell me just what it is. You can't hide things from me.'

'Though you can hide them so well from me, Andrew?'

'Have you found out anything that I have been hiding, Mary? Out with it, if you have. You need not be afraid of worrying me. I am as well as ever I was in my life, except that I am not able to move. What is it, my girl?'

It was fully as hard for Mary Lovell to conceal anything from her husband as for Ruth Prescott to withhold the least thought from hers. She hesitated, however, for a few seconds, until Andrew repeated his question, when she answered it with another:

'Have you and Ben Atkins ever had any quarrel?'

The face, which had resumed its paleness, flushed again, and then a smile passed over it, and he said:

'None whatever. What put such a thing in your mind? Come, Mary, tell us all about it. You won't hurt me by telling me the truth, though you might worry me by beating about the bush like this. Who has been talking to you about me and Ben Atkins?'

'First, Mr. Broadbank, Andrew; and now Ben's wife.'

'Mr. Broadbank!' exclaimed Andrew; 'where on earth did you see him, and how should he know anything about it?'

'Then there is something to know, Andrew. I think *you* had better tell the truth, and not worry *me* by hiding up things.'

'If I thought it would not make you anxious——' said Andrew.

'Oh, Andrew!' she said; 'what did you say only a moment ago?—that it makes one far more anxious to be imagining all sorts of things than to know the truth. Do tell me all.'

'And you will never breathe a word of it to anyone?'

'Never, if you tell me not. Have I ever disobeyed a wish of yours?'

So he told her all, she listening with dilated eyes, her face flushed, and her imagination running meanwhile into all the possibilities that might have resulted from that night's adventure, but not speaking a word until he ended his tale. Then she said:

'Oh, Andrew! it might have been murder. No wonder Ben's wife looked so dreadfully bad this morning.'

'I don't expect he has told her,' said Andrew. 'Mrs. Atkins is scarcely the woman whom a man would like to trust with such a secret.'

'I am sure he has not, Andrew. But she has perceived that there is something amiss; she told me herself, not being gifted with much discretion, as you know, that her husband had got something on his mind, he was *that* worried and irritable by day, and got no rest at night; and she tried hard to get the truth out of me this morning. Perhaps it was as well that I did not know anything. She must have seen that I did not.'

'Perhaps it is a pity that you know anything now, Mary,' replied Andrew. Then, after a few minutes' pause, he added: 'But I don't think so. I believe it has all happened just as will be for the best. You had better go to Ben yourself, Mary, and tell him I wish to speak to him.'

'I don't expect he will come, Andrew.'

'Oh yes, he will, if you give him my message, and add a little persuasion on your own part. I would write him a line, only secrets are never safe on paper, especially when there's any suspicion about them. That is my experience, and I know I can trust you. You are not quite the same sort of woman as Ben Atkins's wife. Tell him I want to speak to him on particular business this evening, and that he need not mind coming, for I mean to do to him as I would wish him to do to me if I were in his place, and he in mine.'

'And if he asks me if I know what you want him for, Andrew?'

'Then you can tell him you do, and that it is to shake hands and forgive him, and let him know that his secret is as safe with us as it is with him. You had better just keep in his way when he comes out from the mill, and get a word with him before he goes home.'

Consequently Ben Atkins felt a light touch on his burly shoulder in the dusk that evening—it was always dusk early in that part of Crowley—just as he entered the narrow passage that led to his own court, and turning round with the quick start of one whose mind was ill at ease, he saw Mary Lovell, and received from her Andrew's message.

'You had better come now,' she said.

'What does he want me for, mistress?' he asked. 'I have not got anything to do with him, though there's them that would make out that I have. There be always folks that are ready to spread about lies, to shield themselves, no doubt. What does your husband want with me, do you know?'

'Yes, I do,' she said.

And she spoke with a courage which it surprised her to remember afterwards; for she was a timid little woman, and had always stood rather in awe of 'Burly Ben,' even when he and her husband were good friends, and he used to come

in of an evening for a chat, or to fetch Andrew away to a trades-union meeting.

'Yes, I do know.' And looking up and down the narrow alley to make sure there was no one in it besides themselves, she added: 'He has told me all that happened that night; but he does not mean to tell anyone else. He bid me say that he wanted to shake hands with you and let you know that he forgave you, and that your secret was as safe with us as with yourself. But he wants to see you. I am sure he will sleep the better for having done so. And I should think so would you. Besides, if folks are talking, it's the best thing you can do to stop them. Many of Andrew's chums have been to see him. They have asked him a lot of questions about the accident, but they have not got anything out of him. Nobody will ever get anything out of Andrew that he doesn't mean to tell.'

Ben knew this to be true well enough; but he hesitated, doubtful of Andrew's feelings or intentions, in spite of Mary's assurances.

'Come, Ben,' she said; 'I can't stop longer. It's getting late, and I must not keep my neighbour up at home waiting for me to get back. Andrew won't think I've done my errand well if you don't go to see him. He does not bear you a scrap of ill will. On my word he does not.'

'And you?' said Ben.

'I?' she said; 'oh, I felt very bad, I own, when first I heard it; but indeed I don't now, not after hearing Andrew speak. I would not have breathed a word to anyone for anything, because he told me not. But I would not wish to now; because it's quite true what Andrew says: we must do to others as we would like them to do to us, or we can't really be trying to please God. Besides, it's a sin to hate anyone. It's as bad as murder in God's eyes.'

'So that's the reason you don't hate me,' said Ben, in a softened tone.

He had always had a liking for Andrew Lovell's gentle little 'Southerner' of a wife, whose soft speech and quiet manners were a great contrast to the rough-and-ready demeanour of most of the women in the place, and especially to that of his own wife, whose tongue, as he often told her, was as sharp as the blade of a Sheffield knife.

'So that's why you don't hate me, mistress.'

'Oh, don't let us talk any more,' she answered. 'But do come. I don't hate you, anyhow; and as for Andrew, I believe he loves you. I think he loves everyone—I really do. And the worse they behave to him the more he seems to want to do for them. He's a saint, if ever there was one.'

'I believe he is,' replied Ben, 'though I have not got much idea of one. But he is not like any other fellow I know; and my good old mother used to say that was the way with saints. And I'll just give my face a wash and come along with you.'

'Oh, don't stop for that, but come now; it's getting so late. You need not stop a minute, but only do come along with me now.'

And he went along with her.

Big as he was, he felt as timid as any frightened child as the porter opened the heavy door of the Infirmary, and, with a smile at Mary, who was a very favoured individual indeed with the old man, bid them 'go on upstairs,' albeit at this most unusual hour.

But the first sight of Andrew's face brought back his failing courage, though it sent a pang to his heart of a very different nature from any he had yet felt during those weeks of self-reproach and fear, when he had lived in daily expectation of punishment, and had trembled at the sight of a constable.

The very words that Mary had uttered on first hearing her husband's story came into Ben Atkins's mind as Andrew Lovell stretched out his hand to him—it would be a long

time before a hand like that could do a bit of work again—and greeted him with a friendly smile on a face reduced by illness and suffering to such a state of pallor and emaciation that it seemed hard to realize it could be Andrew Lovell's face, so changed from what he had known it only a few weeks ago.

'It might have been murder,' he said to himself. 'Thank God he has pulled through.'

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE CATECHISM.

'GRANNIE,' said little Winifred to Mrs. Heathcote, with wide-opened blue eyes fixed on her grandmother's face, and great eagerness in her voice, 'what *do* you think Hannah says?'

If little Winifred had an objection to gaining knowledge through the means of books, she was, like the Athenians of old, ever ready to learn any new thing by means of her hearing.

'I am sure I don't know,' replied her grandmother. 'Perhaps something that she had better not have said.'

She spoke gravely.

Hannah's besetting sins clung to her also, and were often still a source of trouble to her mistress, all the more because of her sincere attachment to this faithful servant of many years' standing.

'But I may tell *you*, grannie,' said Winifred, her words requiring, as usual, to be considerably underlined, if they are to convey any idea whatever of the emphasis with which they were uttered. 'You know mother likes me to tell you *everything* when she is not here. Hannah says, it's very dreadful, grannie, but she says it's true that that poor man we have been to see so often at St. Margaret's was *not* nearly killed by an accident. She says it was another man that tried to murder him! Is not it dreadful, grannie? And are you not glad he did not kill him? for he is such a nice, good man!'

'It was very wrong of Hannah to say such a thing, and she does not in the least know that it is true.'

'But *is* it true, grannie?'

'No, Winnie, it is not true.'

'And it *was* an accident, grannie—*quite* an accident?'

Then, thus happily herself preventing the necessity of a reply to her question, she added, a new thought coming rapidly to her mind:

'And Hannah broke the commandment grandpapa taught us about last Sunday — *she* bore false witness against her neighbour. I shall tell her.'

'You had better leave that to me, Winnie.'

'But it *was* false witness, grannie, and she did break that commandment. You know grandpapa said we were not to think that we only broke it when we were had up before the court and put upon our oath, and then told lies, as that man did whom we saw tried at the assizes, and who was found guilty of—what did they call it, grannie?'

'Perjury, Winnie, swearing falsely. No, indeed, Winnie, it does not need to go so far as that to be guilty of bearing false witness in the sight of God. I wonder if my little Winnie remembers what grandpapa said this commandment included?'

'Yes, grannie, I do. Every kind of evil speaking.'

'Every word we say against anyone, Winnie — every word we say *of* them which we would not say *to* them. There is a verse in the Bible that puts whispering and backbiting amongst all the most dreadful things, because it leads to them. That is why we are so expressly forbidden by God's law to go up and down as a tale-bearer amongst the people.'

'I think Hannah *is* a tale-bearer, grannie, but I like to hear her talk, she tells such amusing stories. I like Hannah very much; and I am sure so do you, grannie.'

'Very much indeed, Winnie; but that does not make me

blind to Hannah's faults any more than my love for you makes me blind to yours.'

'Mother says that,' said Winnie. 'She says it is because she loves me so much that she so often finds fault with me.'

'"As many as I love, I rebuke,"' replied Mrs. Heathcote. 'Who says that, Winnie?'

'God, grannie. And will you rebuke Hannah?'

'Certainly I shall, because I am her mistress; and if I see any fault in her, or hear any evil of her, it is my duty to do so; but it is not yours, Winnie. And you must remember that where we are not obliged by our duty to rebuke evil in our neighbour, we *are* obliged to shut our eyes to it. You learned the fifteenth Psalm only the other day. Do you remember who are mentioned there amongst those who are to abide in God's tabernacle, and dwell in His holy hill? "He that hath used no deceit with his tongue, nor——"'

Winifred had no difficulty in concluding the verse: "Nor done evil to his neighbour, and hath not slandered his neighbour."'

The rebuke to Hannah was given very gently, but very faithfully.

And, given in the spirit of love by a Christian mistress, it was received in the spirit of gratitude by a Christian servant.

'I know it is my besetting sin,' she said. 'I would not, for the world, knowingly do anyone an injury, but I am for ever forgetting that talking and repeating lead to taking away people's characters, and make no end of trouble. It does not seem wrong at the time.'

'One is so ready to forget that God's commandment is exceedingly broad,' replied Mrs. Heathcote. 'So many who would shrink from grossly violating any one of the Ten Commandments are led almost unconsciously into breaking them in spirit every day of their lives.'

Which was the very truth which Andrew Lovell was seek-

ing to impress upon Ben Atkins at that very moment, as they sat together in what was called the 'Convalescent Ward' of St. Margaret's Infirmary.

A curious contrast the two men presented in personal appearance. Andrew lying thin and pale on the couch; Ben, looking by comparison bigger and burlier than ever, sitting beside him in an armchair, which, though not of small dimensions, barely sufficed to hold his huge frame.

But if the outward difference between the two men had never seemed more striking, an inward resemblance had begun to exist between them—a resemblance which was to become stronger and stronger as each became more and more filled with that renewing and re-creating spirit which was its origin.

'Yes,' said Ben, bringing down his big hand on the little table which stood by Andrew's couch with a force which made the tea-things still standing on it ring and rattle; 'yes, my mind is made up. I'll go along with you, please God, the first day you get to church—and you say they hope that will be within the next month. You shall go up the aisle on Ben Atkins's arm. You're a lucky man to have taken work at Abbott's, for it is a great help to a man to have things made easy for him, as the folks have got there. Still, it don't need *that* to keep a man straight when once he has made up his mind, for you've had no more advantages than the rest of us all this time that you have been working at Broadbanks', and you've kept firm to your religion ever since you took to it.'

'It needs God's grace,' said Andrew. 'Nothing else can enable a man to keep God's commandments—not all the strength of will in the world, Ben!'

'Especially when one looks on them in the light that you do, Andrew,' said Ben gravely.

'In the light that God looks on them, Ben. There's many a murderer in His eyes that never raised his hand against a fellow-creature.'

'As I did against you on that night, which I shall be sorry for as long as I live!' said Ben.

'Well, God has brought good out of it, Ben, though it was wrong. It has made us two friends.'

'For ever!' said Ben warmly. 'Please God, if ever Andrew Lovell wants a friend, he'll know where to find one. Though I don't see how it will ever be in my power to do aught for you, Andrew.'

'I do, Ben.'

'And how?'

'Only by keeping to what you have just said, and striving in God's grace to keep God's commandments.'

'And that I will do!—God helping!' replied Ben, as he took Andrew's carefully-washed white hand between his two big and, it must be allowed, not very clean ones, and, grasping it warmly, wished him good-night.

Some part of this conversation Andrew repeated to his wife when she took her place on the following afternoon beside his couch.

'Poor fellow!' she said, as Andrew ceased talking, 'he only says the truth. And there are many things besides those he mentioned, Andrew, which make it harder for him than for some men to keep straight. I am afraid his wife is no good!'

'And *you* are,' said Andrew, looking lovingly at her innocent, honest face, which made her such a sweet and pleasant, albeit by no means pretty woman—'you *are*, I suppose?'

'Well, I certainly am not such a woman as she is—neglecting her house and her husband and child, and off at all hours to every sort of place where there's any amusement going on. Ben used to boast that he had married the handsomest girl in Birmingham. I am sure her good looks have only been a curse to him. A flirting, good-for-nothing woman, I call her. I should like to have the courage to repeat to her all you have just said about lightness of

conduct and want of modesty in dress and conversation being a direct breaking of the seventh commandment.'

'Which you consider that she breaks, while you only break the ninth,' replied Andrew, with a very grave smile.

'I only speak so to you, Andrew; but that woman puts me out of all patience—especially now that Ben is trying hard to do right. The way she neglects that sweet little boy of hers makes me mad with her. Mrs. Heathcote spoke to me about it, and said how glad she was that I got him in along with my children sometimes to mother him up a bit.'

'Ben told me to-night how grateful he was to you for it, Mary. He only wishes his wife would carry him to you when she goes out of an evening, as she does so constantly. He can't bear her taking the child to Mrs. Sloman.'

'I'm sure I don't wonder at that. Those Slomans are not a bit of good either, mother or daughters, though the mother is obliged now to stop at home on account of her rheumatism. But I should not like to keep the child at night, even if Mrs. Atkins were to ask me to do so. It would be like helping her in her wrong ways of going on. Besides, I would not keep my house open up to the time that she comes in. I wonder Ben stands his wife's behaviour as he does.'

'Ben has been a man to stand a good deal for a quiet life, Mary. He was saying so himself to-night. His wife's loud tongue has been a greater worry to him than her light conduct. There's a long time that they have been each of them content to let the other go their own evil way. But I think we shall see a change now that Ben is beginning to look on the wrong and right of things.'

'He won't find it easy to make his wife change her way of going on, Andrew.'

'I don't expect he will try to do so just at first, Mary. He will begin by changing his own. This very evening he means to go straight back to his house, fetching his

little boy from the Slomans', and taking him home with him.'

'I wonder if he will have the courage to pass the Blue Dragon,' said Mary.

'I am sure he will,' replied Andrew.

And his belief was a correct one, founded as it was in faith in the power of his own prayers for Ben, and the prayers which he knew Ben had offered for himself that God's strength might be sufficient for his weakness.

The lights burned brightly behind the green shutters of the Blue Dragon. The parlour within Ben knew well to be bright and cheerful, with the warmth of a good fire, and the society of boon companions; the odour that streamed from it, sickening to the senses of the temperate and sober, had a strong attraction to one who loved a glass as well as he did, and knew what its power would be to draw him out of the depression from which he was suffering at that moment into, at all events, temporary cheerfulness.

But Ben went straight on, almost running up against two men who came up to the door from the opposite direction just as he was passing it.

'Hullo!' exclaimed one of them; 'what's up with you? You never mean to say you're passing this door without going in?'

Now Ben's mind was naturally about as weak as his body was strong; but this strength to which he was trusting, and which he himself felt came from without, and not from within, led him to say decidedly:

'Yes, I am, Joe Moore. I am going straight home.'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CATECHISM.

And straight home Ben Atkins went, stopping, however, twice on his way there—first at the Lovells' house to say that Mrs. Lovell would be an hour later than usual in returning from the Infirmary, and then at the Slomans', to fetch his little 'Bunnie,' as the child called himself.

The maid-of-all-work—for the Misses Sloman kept a servant—opened her eyes wide at sight of him, and still wider when he asked her to fetch the child. She begged him to come in—'his little boy was asleep on the sofa in the parlour'; but Ben declined, so she fetched the boy, and gave him, sleeping, into his father's arms.

The little fellow just roused sufficiently to put his arms round his father's neck with a tight grasp, and then his head fell on Ben's shoulder in a sounder sleep than ever.

'Bless him!' Ben murmured. 'Poor little man! neglected by both his parents. But never again by his father. No; God helping me, never again.'

He carried him home, opened the door of the kitchen with the key of which Mrs. Ben Atkins had the duplicate, and laid him on his little bed: such an untidy, uncomfortable-looking bed as it was. It had not been made up that day, nor for some days before, and the covers lay tossed back as Mrs. Atkins had left them when she took the sleeping child from it some hours before, in a great hurry,

not to keep her friends waiting, and carried him to the Slomans'.

This time the boy did wake, and sitting up in bed, looked round him, as his father drew his match-box from his pocket and lighted a candle.

A desolate room, indeed, was that which its light revealed. Not that it was more desolate now than when Ben usually returned to it after his evenings at the public-house. But he was then too dulled by drink to have much perception of its untidiness or dreariness, or to have any other thought save to fling himself down and sleep off the evening's revel, before the bell summoned him once more to the next day's work.

Now, with both brain and sight perfectly clear, the miserable state of the house struck home to his very heart, all the more keenly from the contrast it presented to that other home into which he had just looked. There, as he well knew—for Ben Atkins of late had been a frequent visitor at Andrew Lovell's, seeking to bring him back to the union — all was neatness and order, and peace and comfort.

Here—though he was much better off than Andrew Lovell, so far as worldly means went, for his wages were higher and his family smaller—all was untidiness, dirt, disorder, and discomfort. The hearth had not been swept nor the stove cleaned for days; the dust of many weeks lay upon the unswept floor; his clothes, his wife's, the child's, were all huddled together in confusion on the backs of the sofa and the chairs, unbrushed, unwashed and unmended.

His heart failed within him at the sight of such neglect, and a word which, had it been uttered, would have been a curse on the cause of it all, rose to his very lips.

But it was checked. His wife was partly the cause, but only partly. Fully half of the blame of all this misery was due to him. His eyes had been opened to that fact, and he was not going to close them to it again.

What to do for the best he scarcely knew, and there was no time to think about it at this moment, for the child began to cry, and taking him in his arms, his father sought for some food to give him.

Nothing was to be found in the cupboard but bread-and-butter, and some cold remains of the day's dinner; but with these Ben prepared a little supper for himself and 'Bunnie,' not without some thoughts of the ale and the gin-and-water which Joe Moore and others were at that moment enjoying at the Blue Dragon.

Munching away with his little white teeth at the well-buttered piece of bread with which his father had supplied him, little 'Bunnie' lifted up his curly head, and pulling at his father's beard, said, 'Daddy eat too,' striving to put some of his bread-and-butter into his father's mouth.

What a sweet little face it was to be sure that Ben looked down upon! the round cheeks, still smeared with tears, but covered with dimples also, and a merry smile playing round the rosy mouth and shining in the blue eyes—eyes of a deeper, brighter blue than ever shone in the sky at Crowley, even in its midsummer fulness of brightness.

'No mammie,' said the child, evidently by no means unhappy at her absence; 'mammie gone. Bunnie got daddy—good daddy—Bunnie *do* love daddy.'

And again the beard was pulled down by the little fingers, and the little face was lifted up, this time with the petition, in a pretty pleading baby tone:

'Daddie kiss Bunnie. Bunnie *do* love daddy.'

There were tears in Burly Ben's eyes as he complied with the little fellow's request, and as he did so a strange memory came back to him. Only two or three minutes before, as he was seeking in the untidy cupboard, angry, revengeful thoughts had once more taken possession of his disturbed mind. 'It was cruel,' he said to himself, 'it was unnaturally cruel, to neglect a little innocent creature as this

child's mother neglected him. He might have caught his death of cold, being brought out of a warm room fast asleep on such a bitter night as this.' Andrew Lovell had said truly that there were more ways of murder than one. They had been speaking then of the death of a young woman in the neighbourhood, who had worked at a factory where the master had refused to introduce the wheel which would have carried off the fluff, which had found its way into her weak lungs, and thrown her into consumption. Ben Atkins had declared that her death, and that of many more, lay at the master's door. And Andrew Lovell, though he said that it was for God, and not for man, to judge, had not contradicted the assertion; for had he not himself just been saying that the sixth commandment is broken more frequently than is supposed? And where lives are sacrificed by cruelty, or neglect, or avarice, are not those who help to sacrifice them guilty of the sin of murder in God's eyes, although it may be in such a way as to be unrecognised by man's observation, and to escape human justice?

This conversation returned to Ben's mind as he sat now with his boy on his knee, over the untidy hearth, where fire was not, though sadly needed on such a bitter night. If this child had died through his mother's neglect, his death would have lain at her door. His wife would be guilty of murder. Once more bitter thoughts found their way into his mind. Andrew Lovell had said that God was just, and God was loving. Why, then, should He have made such a difference between two of His creatures as existed at that moment between him and Andrew?

His thoughts turned to the pleasant home where the Lovells lived so happily together, a house in no respect different from his own, no larger, no better, but where the thoughtful care of a good wife and mother made all pleasant and comfortable for husband and children. No wonder that Andrew never cared to enter a public-house when the fire

was burning brightly in his own, and the supper laid ready for him, and little Andrew, as Ben had often seen, made neat and tidy, that he might help to amuse his father with the prattle of all that he had done and seen during the day; while the baby was put off to sleep that he might not disturb him during his meal.

A home like that, well ordered and healthful for mind and body, a wife like Mary Lovell, gentle, thoughtful, patient, and industrious, never so happy as when busy within the four walls of her own house, caring for the comforts of her husband and children, with such blessings as these, how easy would it not be to become a better man!

Little Bunnie came to the end of his bread-and-butter, finishing the last mouthfuls in very sleepy fashion, and letting his head fall at length on his father's shoulder, as he murmured, 'Bunnie go to sleep now.'

And his father roused himself from his gloomy reflections to lay him in his bed, rather reluctantly, for he would have preferred to keep him in his arms; but the night was bitterly cold, and he was afraid the child would suffer unless he bestirred himself to light a fire.

So he laid him once more softly in the untidy crib, standing beside it for a moment as the little head, with its tangled curls—which only needed a mother's care to be so many rings of glossy beauty—fell on the pillow, and the eyes which had so lately been fixed lovingly and longingly on his father were soon fast closed in sleep, and the long lashes resting on the round rosy cheek.

As he did so, a sudden flash from the land of memory dispersed the angry, revengeful thoughts that were at work within his breast, replacing them with others, not less sad, but of an altogether different character.

The boy was singularly handsome, and as singularly like his mother. There was nothing of his strong-featured, ruddy-complexioned, red-haired father about him. He had

the delicate features, the bright colouring, the wavy brown hair, the full lustrous eyes of his mother, who had been—as he had so often boasted—'the handsomest girl in Birmingham.'

At this moment the image of her as she was then rose as vividly before Ben's mind as though he had only just returned from one of those strolls out into the distant fields which formed the chief delights of his life, if only he could secure Phœbe Barker for his companion in the cowslip gathering which was the excuse for love-making.

And he remembered also—he had often thought of it since—he had even sometimes repeated it angrily and reproachfully to Phœbe—a conversation he had had one day with his old mother on his return from one of these country expeditions in which he generally sought to spend his holiday.

'You've been along with Barker's pretty daughter again, I hear,' she had said to him as he took his place at the supper table.

To which he had replied that 'he had, and, what was more, he meant to go along with her whenever he could get her to come along with him, whatever jealousy and spite might lead folks to say about her.'

'It is not jealousy or spite, Ben,' his mother had said, very gently; for, as he had lately told Andrew, Widow Atkins was a 'saint,' and carried her saintliness into every word and act. 'You know, my lad, that your mother is not one to let her tongue indulge in evil-speaking, or lying and slandering.'

Which Ben could not contradict, for until now he never remembered having heard her utter one word in dispraise of any living soul.

'It was not for her to judge anyone,' she would say, 'and she had enough to do with her own faults and shortcomings without meddling with those of other people.'

But neither was it for her, as a mother, to let her son be led into marrying a girl like Phœbe Barker, whose character had been something more than tarnished, without remonstrating earnestly with him.

But all remonstrance had been vain. Ben had married her—married her because she was the handsomest creature he had ever seen, and he coveted the possession of her. After that Widow Atkins was never heard to say a word against her daughter-in-law, but she was known many times to go in secretly, when young Mrs. Atkins was out, to put the place straight for her son; and often when, even in those early days of marriage, Ben came home, to find his handsome young wife gone to the theatre with some of her old friends, he would come over to his mother's to have 'a bit of supper with her,' no word of his disappointment passing between them, but the same thought in both their minds—that he had made a wretched marriage, and had done it wilfully.

To-night he recalled this conversation with his mother as he had never done before, not more vividly perhaps, but in a totally different spirit.

And then his mind travelled yet further back, as, having lighted his fire, he sat beside it, no sound in the room save the quiet breathing of the sleeping child—and he remembered another conversation, not with his mother, but with his father. It had also often returned to his mind before, but until now only to be driven from it; for it was not a pleasant memory, and what was the use of letting one's self think of anything unpleasant? Much better go off to the Blue Dragon, and drown all such useless remembrances in a glass or two. If a man could make himself 'jolly' with drink, why should he let himself be miserable for want of it?

But to-night Ben had not been to the Blue Dragon, and when the remembrance of this conversation with his

father returned to his mind, though it filled it with sadness —such sadness as it had never brought into it before—he did not seek to drive it away, but allowed it to remain, the sight of his sleeping child seeming to inspire him with courage to hold parley with his conscience concerning it.

'Ben, my boy,' his father had said, on that well-remembered night when the doctors had told him there would be no rally from an operation which an accident had made necessary, 'you're my only lad, and I leave your mother to you. She'll miss her old man sore, I know, for we've got along all our lives without so much as a word between us that I'd wish unsaid now I've come to this. And it has all been along of one thing that we have been so happy, and so prosperous too; for we've never wanted for anything, though we have had to work for our living. Shall I tell you what that one thing has been, Ben, or do you know?'

And Ben had said that he thought he did know, and that it was because his father had been such a good man and his mother such a good woman.

On which a smile which lighted up every feature had rested on the old man's face, as he said—they were almost his last words:

'Not good, my lad, there's no one good, but God-fearing. We've sought to do two things: to do our duty towards God and our duty towards our neighbour. Do you seek to do the same. Your mother will show you how. There's no one can teach you better.'

And Widow Atkins had taught him, and Ben had learned; and for many years, both as a boy and a man, he had so well fulfilled his duty to his neighbour, that his mother had hoped that it was because he was so anxious to fulfil his duty to his God. No lad could have loved and honoured and succoured a widowed mother better than he had done, no lad could have submitted himself better to his masters and teachers, or behaved more lowly and reverently to his

betters. He had never been a sharp boy, or quick at his books; but at school there was never a complaint of his conduct, and after he left school, and went to work, there was not a lad more liked both by his employers and his fellow-workmen. Never had Ben been known to hurt anybody by word or deed, or to be anything but true and just in all his dealings.

And yet this boy and this youth were the same who, as a middle-aged man, was the best customer at the Blue Dragon, whose strong voice was always one of the loudest to cheer every other raised in defiance of the laws of the Sovereign whom he had been taught to honour and obey, who exerted himself, much as he disliked exertion, to dispute the authority of those above him, who made an open avowal of the coveting he felt for other men's goods, and his discontent with his own state of living.

By what means had such a change been wrought? By the influence of one weak, vain, selfish, worldly woman, who had so fascinated him by her beauty and deceived him by her wiles, that he had set her image up within his heart to be worshipped; and then, when it had fallen down, and he had found what he had fancied to be gold was the vilest clay—then he had grown discouraged and broken-spirited. Discontent had seized him for its prey, a discontent for which drink seemed the only remedy. Cleverer men than himself had obtained a powerful influence over him, and thus had Ben Atkins, not so very long ago the simplest and most good-natured of men, come very near to being tried for manslaughter.

Yet all this time his father's God was watching over him, nor was the power of sin to prevail for ever. How often had his mother's prayers gone up to the Lord God, the heavenly Father, who is the giver of all goodness, that He would send His grace unto her backsliding son's heart, and save him and defend him in all the ghostly and bodily dangers which

surrounded him! A disappointed heart and a remorseful conscience had driven him to drink, even before he left his old home, and since then he had gone from bad to worse. But those faithful prayers were not lost; and now, for the first time since his marriage, Ben was beginning to pray for himself that God would keep him from sin and wickedness.

And the 'ghostly enemy'—who saw him on his knees that night for the first time, kneeling for a few minutes by his little Bunnie's bed, while the prayer of the publican went up from his very heart, 'God be merciful to me a sinner'—began to fear lest he should be deprived of his prey.

For he knew that God, of His mercy and goodness, is ever ready to forgive sins, and to save the penitent sinner from everlasting death.

CHAPTER XXXV.

CONFIRMATION.

GREAT as was Harold Moorhouse's disappointment at not being confirmed in his father's church in the quiet village in which he had been born and brought up, and which was dearer to him than any other place on earth, it would have been a yet greater disappointment to have begun his school career without having taken on himself those vows of faith and obedience and renunciation which his sponsors had made for him when he was a child, but which, even had they not done so, he knew perfectly he was bound to keep 'in virtue of his Christian profession.'

Ever since he could remember, his mother had kept clearly before his mind the obligations laid upon him by the vows made for him at his Baptism.

Lately, both she and his father had been earnestly endeavouring to impress him strongly with the solemnity of that holy ordinance of Confirmation which is the completion of Holy Baptism, marking, as it has been well said, 'the last step in the pathway of Christian childhood,' and 'sounding on the verge of Christian maturity the trumpet-call of Christian duty' to those who, having promised to fight manfully under Christ's banner against sin, the world, and the devil, are now called to take up the arms provided for them, and march bravely forward to the field of battle.

'You used to wish to be a soldier,' his father had said to him that morning.

'When I was a little fellow, father,' he answered; 'not lately.'

His father smiled.

'Not since you have got into the world of books, in which you take such delight.'

'As grandfather says mother always did. Yes, I would rather be a scholar.'

'And so I hope you will be, Harold,' replied his father.

A hope of which there was every promise of fulfilment, for Harold had just won an open exhibition at Rugby—a whole year before the usual time. No boy's name stood on the school books as having attained such an honour at the same age; and with such health as he possessed—for it was very rarely that one saw so ardent and aspiring a mind in such a strongly-built frame—there was indeed every reason for anticipating for him a successful career.

'But you will be a soldier, too?—though not of the kind you desired in younger days.'

'Yes, father,' he said, 'a Christian soldier.'

He spoke the words simply and manfully. He had been brought up in the quiet village of Amersham, taught all holy doctrines, trained in all Christian virtues from his very infancy. He would have blushed at the sound of a coarse word, and been roused to indignation by the sight of cruelty or cowardice. He had never yet imagined that it could be anything but an honour to be a soldier and a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. Would it always be so? His father knew well what the temptations of school life were, though his son did not; and he knew, too, that, although he had done his best to prepare his boy's mind and soul to meet those temptations, there was a wide difference between knowing what one ought to do, and doing the thing that should be done.

Mr. Moorhouse did not doubt for a moment that the grace of God dwelt most truly in his boy's heart. He had never

wilfully sinned away the grace of his Baptism. From childhood he had been a good, obedient, loving, truthful boy, such a son as parents might well rejoice in, and give daily thanks for. But he knew well also that much of his simplicity and ingenuousness came from ignorance of evil; that much of his religion, his interest in all good things, in prayer, in the services of the Church, in works of benevolence, came from the constant presence of good influences; and much of his courage in standing up for the right and reproving the wrong from the example of others and the absence of any pressure of temptation.

Often and often, as he watched the singular promise of his only boy's opening character, which seemed to turn almost instinctively to all sweet and lovely influences, had he thought of the dangerous blight to which every fair bud must be exposed in the first days of school life. There, in the very nature of things, the innocence of his childish days must go from him, the first-fruits from the dangerous tree of the knowledge of evil must be placed within his daily reach. What would be the result? Would the happy belief of his childhood be exchanged for the carelessness and indifference of youth, or would the sounds of coarseness and profanity which must fall on his ears only lead him to love more dearly the sweet words of home life, and the constant sight of falsehood and selfishness only lead him to long more ardently himself to remain true and pure, and brave and loving-hearted?

It was an anxious time for such a father as Mr. Moorhouse. One thought alone was of comfort to him, especially when the fear came over his mind that he had, perhaps, as he had often been told, been mistaken in keeping his boy so long at home; and this was the knowledge of the sufficiency of God's grace to supply all human weakness. He longed that the good seed might be preserved within his boy's heart, and that no effort of any evil companion migh

trample it out, and no influence of any evil spirit might work its destruction. Watered by God's grace, watched over by His good angels, the opening flower would escape in safety every unhealthful blight, and withstand the breath of every adverse wind. Thought, the thought which was the chief characteristic of Harold's mind, would develop into faith; noble impulses would become manly actions; right feelings would develop into good principles. No wonder, then, if he earnestly desired that, before the boy went to school, he should receive in Holy Confirmation the strength that would enable him truly to keep the promises of his Baptism, through the sevenfold gifts of God's Holy Spirit.

And therefore, since no Confirmation would be held in his own little church for another year, it had been arranged that Harold should be confirmed at Little Burton, in the church of St. Simon and St. Jude.

To one person, at all events, this arrangement had brought unmingled pleasure. And that person was the old pensioner. 'Expect good and you shall have it,' he had said that morning, when Mrs. Grainger wheeled round his chair to the door, and told him the bells had begun to ring—those bells which he had so often longed to hear, and which had been Mr. Prescott's offering to the church on his wedding-day—an offering of thankfulness to God, Who had given him the desire of his heart after long waiting.

'Expect good and you shall have it,' he said, as he put his arm within the widow's, and was led by her to his chair. 'You know how often I have been sorry not to have been at the baptism of either of my dear Miss Helen's children. But this is better still. I would rather be present when the lad—there's not another like him—now is there, Mrs. Grainger?'

Mrs. Grainger replied that she really did not think there was, either for beauty, or for cleverness, or goodness; and the old man continued:

'I would rather be there, when he comes up of himself,

openly before the church, to declare with his own mouth and consent his firm belief in the truths of the Gospel, and his resolute intention by God's grace to live according to those truths. You'll put me where I can hear him speak. You'll remember I can't see him.'

There was no difficulty in gratifying this wish. The Vicar, people said constantly, thought of everything and everybody. And certainly he had thought of old David Graham to-day; for in the seat in one of the side aisles, reserved for the boy's own nearest and dearest, his mother, and grandmother, and little sister, he had desired Winifred to keep a place for the blind pensioner, adding that he would thus be close to the spot where Harold would stand in the nave reserved for the catechumens.

And as the old man concluded his prayer, Winifred laid her hand on his shoulder and whispered:

'He's quite close to you—quite close.'

The candidates had been desired to pronounce very audibly the words which formed the answer to the Bishop's solemn question—only two words, and only three letters in them, and yet a whole lifetime either of truth or falsehood, of Christian success or failure, implied in the keeping or the breaking of this renewal of baptismal vows.

Old David's white head was turned towards the spot where Harold stood, his face eager with interest, as the Bishop put the inquiry to the candidates, whether they did, in the presence of God and of that congregation, renew the solemn promise and vow made in their name at their baptism, ratifying and confirming the same in their own persons, and acknowledging themselves bound to believe and to do all the things which their godfathers and godmothers had then undertaken for them.

Many voices made clear and distinct reply. There were four hundred children confirmed that day in Little Burton Church, besides several grown-up persons.

But Harold's clear, decided tones fell distinctly on the old man's ear as he pronounced, in a firm, manly voice:

'I do.'

'And he will,' David murmured to himself. 'I know he will.'

He felt, as the sentences following were read, that the boy's help, and the help of those who were praying for him, was truly and entirely in the name of the Lord, of that mighty God who had made heaven and earth, and had all power over the souls and bodies of men. And, feeling that their trust was in Him, and in Him alone, he knew that God would hear their prayers, and that their cry would come unto Him.

Not for the first time in his life had Harold Moorhouse openly acknowledged his obligation *to do* as well as to believe the things promised for him at his baptism. From earliest childhood his constant repetition of the Church Catechism had been to him no idle repeating of a mere form of words, but an intelligent confession of the duties and responsibilities laid upon him and every other Christian child at baptism.

And now, when he stood up in the midst of that large congregation, in the presence of the Bishop, one of the chief pastors of Christ's Church, and of many other of His ministers and servants, with the full consciousness not only of their presence as witnesses of his words, but also of the presence of God Himself, and His attendant hosts in heaven, no one could have watched the look on Harold Moorhouse's face with as anxious and searching a glance as his mother did without realizing that it was with a full understanding of its meaning, and a full intention to keep it, that he renewed that day his solemn promise to his heavenly Father.

His mother saw the look on his face; old David heard the tone of his voice. The same thought was in both t[illegible]

minds—the confidence, inspired by faith, that past prayers had been heard, that their present prayers would be heard. The Almighty and ever-living God Who had vouchsafed to regenerate this youthful servant of His by water and the Holy Ghost, would not fail to strengthen him with the Holy Ghost the Comforter, but would daily increase in him His manifold gifts. The grace of God was already in his heart, and by Confirmation it would be strengthened. Possessed of the sevenfold gifts of grace, why should those who loved him fear for him? Would not the spirit of wisdom and understanding be with him as it had been with Joseph, in whose wisdom even the unbelieving Pharaoh had recognised something supernatural? Would not the spirit of counsel lead him, as it had led Daniel, to consult the law of his God, and the guidance of his conscience before his own interests and the will of man? Would not the spirit of ghostly strength be made as perfect in his natural weakness as it had been in Gideon, who, going forth in the might of the Lord, did not fail to conquer the Lord's enemies? Was not the spirit of knowledge—not only the knowledge about God, but the knowledge of God—dwelling as truly in him as in Timothy, and directing his way in the paths of true godliness? Had he not already given many proofs that in his heart was that indwelling spirit of holy fear which would lead him to say as did Nehemiah, when he refused to join in the evil practices of others: 'So did not I, because of the fear of the Lord'?

The closing hymn was sung, and the congregation dispersed.

Little Winifred pulled her hand away from Hannah, who had come forward to lead her safely through the crowd, and, running back to Mrs. Heathcote, put it within her grandmother's, and began talking—as they said sometimes only Winnie could talk—of all she had seen.

Mrs. Moorhouse lingered a few steps behind, and, waiting

for David's chair, completed the happiness of that morning to the old man by walking beside it.

'I would like to have seen the laying on of the Bishop's hands on his dear head,' he said; 'but, perhaps, I entered into the hidden meaning, the thing signified, all the more fully from not being able to see the outward and visible sign. I like to think what an ancient form of blessing this is.'

'It is indeed,' Helen answered. 'Jacob laid his hands on the head of his grandsons when he blessed them, and Moses laid his hands on Joshua's head when he committed to him the spiritual charge of God's people, and our Lord put His own hands on the little children whom He blessed.'

'And the rite of Confirmation was instituted by the Apostles,' David replied. 'I remember the minister telling me that our Lord expressly committed the framing of such institutions to the Apostles when He gave them authority to "bind and loose." Yet,' he added, 'there were very few in this place had ever heard of such a thing as Confirmation when I came here. Even quite lately some have asked me if it was not something new.'

'And you told them, David——?'

'That it was as old as the time of the Twelve Apostles, and that if they would look a little more closely into their Bibles they would find that St. Peter and St. John laid their hands on the converts of Samaria for the confirmation of the grace they had received in baptism, and that St. Paul did exactly the same with the disciples whom he found at Ephesus.'

'That verse in the sixth chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, you know, David, speaks of the laying on of hands as one of the first principles of the teaching of the Christian Church,' said Helen.

'And yet how much Confirmation is neglected!' said David.

'We must not complain, David, after the service we have seen this morning.'

'Complain! God forbid! Miss Helen; my heart is much too full of thankfulness for there to be any room left for complaint. I never thought I should live to see such a day as this in Little Burton. And though I certainly shall not live to see them, there are better days yet in store for this place.'

'Yes,' said Helen; 'my father says the number of candidates increases every year.'

'Though he has allowed them to be confirmed so young, Miss Helen.'

'They are all over twelve, David, and in many cases he has been afraid to lose them altogether if he delayed longer. You know the Jewish boys were always presented in the Temple at twelve years old; and after having been examined in the Law, and found well instructed in its requirements, they were considered old enough to obey its commands, and to partake of the Feast of the Passover.'

'That's true,' said David; 'but it does seem young for some of them.'

'No exact age for Confirmation has ever been specified, David. They are all well instructed in the Catechism, and this is the only thing required by the Church.'

'So the minister told me,' replied David. 'He says that the questions asked of the catechumens at the Confirmation used to be all taken from the Catechism, just as the Bishop chose to put them, until about two hundred years ago, when the one solemn question was inserted, to which they have only to answer, "I do." And, oh! will you ever forget hearing your laddie reply to that question?'

'Never, David! I seem now to have no fears for my darling—to have given him entirely over to the favour and gracious goodness of God.'

'And God will defend him with His grace,' replied David. 'His fatherly hand will be ever over him; His Holy Spirit ever with him; I have no fear for him—no fear at all. It

seemed to me when I was making my humble supplications before God for him this morning, and the Bishop laid his hands on him and prayed God to lead him in the knowledge and obedience of His Word, and to direct, sanctify, and govern both his heart and body in the ways of His laws and in the works of His commandments—it seemed to me as if I heard God's answering voice in my heart, promising to defend him in body and soul with His mighty protection here, and in the end to give him everlasting life.'

Such was the faith of those who best loved the boy, and we shall see that it was well grounded.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CONFIRMATION.

Old David was led into his house, and Mrs. Heathcote and little Winifred waited for Mrs. Moorhouse to join them.

No sooner had she done so than Winifred exclaimed:

'Oh, mother! what *do* you think grannie has been telling me about Confirmation? Such a funny thing! She says that a long time ago people used to be allowed to change their names when they were confirmed.'

'And would you like them to be able to do so now, Winnie?'

'Oh no; indeed, I would not, mother! I would rather be called "Winifred Mary" than anything else. Winifred is so pretty, and Mary, too. Besides, Mary is grannie's name—my own dear, dear grannie!'

And the squeeze which the enthusiastic little creature gave to her grandmother's hand, though it pressed her rings into her fingers with sharp pain, sent a throb of happy thankfulness to her very heart. It was so sweet to be thus loved by this warm-hearted child; and her love was all the more precious from the fact of her being Helen's child—the child of her eldest step-daughter. Mrs. Heathcote had not forgotten—does anyone ever forget anything that has been a subject of heart discipline, especially when the sore struggle and earnest prayer have been secrets, known only to one's own soul and to one's God?—she never could forget,

the early days when the coldness of her eldest step-daughter, and her inability to win her confidence, were the only clouds over the sunshine of her life. And now, Winifred was her chief delight. Devoted as she was to all the children, to her handsome, clever eldest grandson, to Ruth's fascinating little Godfrey, with his roguish ways and pretty face, and to her dear baby-girl, who always pressed forward her sweet fat cheeks so readily in response to the request to 'kiss her grandmother'—there was a *rapport* between herself and Winifred closer than any that had ever existed for her since the day when her own 'one wee lamb' fell asleep in her arms, never to wake again in this world.

'And whose name is "Mary" besides dear grannie's?' asked Helen.

'The Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus',' the child replied reverently. 'And I would not be called anything except 'Winifred Mary" for all the world. Indeed, I would not,' she continued, as she saw the smile on her mother's face. 'And grannie says, too, that so many people have always been called "Mary"—after the Virgin Mary—and that some people think they put "N. or M. after the question in the Catechism for "Nicholas or Mary," because they were the commonest names in England at that time. If Harold's name had been Nicholas, I *should* have asked him to change it when he was confirmed. But I would *never* change mine. I should like to change a *great* many things, but not my name.'

'And what are some of these *great* many things, I wonder, Winnie?' asked Mrs. Heathcote.

'Oh, my red hair, and my quick temper, and my stupidity over my lessons, grannie, and lots of things.'

'Well, we must hope some of these will change, Winnie. Your hair' (which, by the way, Mrs. Heathcote never allowed was red, but always called auburn) 'will alter as it grows darker. Not that it would matter if it did not; for

people can be just as happy whether their hair is pretty or not. But the other things, which are of consequence, I trust will change too,—your impatience and carelessness; and Confirmation, we must hope, will help to change them when that day comes for you, as it has come for Harold.'

'I don't think Harold wants to be changed in *anything*,' was Winifred's next emphatic remark. 'Do you, mother?'

'I am sure he does, Winnie.'

'Then I don't, mother. I think he is perfect—quite perfect. Oh, mother! don't you wish he was not going away? But of course you do; though I don't think anyone will miss him quite as much as I shall. There will be no one to go out with me or help me with my lessons. I try not to think about it—only to think of his coming back for the holidays, and what a lot of prizes he will bring with him. I don't believe *any* of the boys will be as clever as he is—do you, mother?'

'Father thinks that there will be some more clever. That is one reason why he wishes Harold to go to school—that he may mix with other boys who are more advanced than he is.'

'But Harold is not the *least* proud of what he knows, mother,' continued Winifred, whose devotion to her only brother had not decreased with her increasing years. 'Mr. Graham says he never saw anyone so clever who thought so little about it.'

'Mr. Graham is very fond of Harold, Winnie.'

He was indeed. At that very moment he was sitting in his large armchair, the chair which Harold's mother had given to him, very wearied in body, for the long service had exhausted him a good deal, but quite fresh in mind, recalling everything that he had heard, or had been told. It had been indeed a happy day, and the following Sunday was to be a yet happier one. For on that day the 'laddie'—'Miss Helen's eldest bairn'—was to draw near for the

first time with him to the Table of the Lord, the young soldier just entering on the field of Christian warfare with the old veteran ready to lay his arms down at his Captain's feet, both equally needing the spiritual strength which the Blessed Sacrament gives.

And that first Communion in which Harold joined was the very last in which old David Graham was to unite in Little Burton Church.

A conviction that this would be the case stole into the Vicar's mind as the old man, leaning on the widow's arm evidently with more than his usual weight, drew near with tottering footsteps to the Holy Table. His whole look and bearing that day made a great impression on the minister's mind. He scarcely thought that the increase of reverence in his manner, always so intense, the deepened look of thankfulness on his face, always so radiant with a chastened joy, the fuller tones of expression in his voice, albeit the body seemed weaker than he had ever seen it before, could be caused only by the fact of this being Harold's first Communion.

When they left the church, Harold lingered behind his mother and grandmother, waiting for his grandfather and his father. Old David Graham was waiting also, that Widow Grainger might arrange him comfortably in his chair after the congregation had dispersed. Was it only by chance that Mr. Heathcote and his son-in-law, as they left the door, had entered into a conversation together concerning some one whom it had grieved them to see that day at the Lord's Table, partaking, unworthily as they had feared, of that Holy Feast?

A solemn warning had been given to this individual during the previous week; but, notwithstanding the Vicar's assurance that to partake of the Holy Sacrament without considering the Lord's Body was to eat and drink his own judgment, and provoke the Lord to visit him with various

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punishments, he had ventured to come. The presence of this unworthy communicant greatly marred the happiness which the Vicar had anticipated in joining in this, the holiest of all services, for the first time with a grandchild. And he was speaking on the subject to his son-in-law, asking his advice as to whether, if warning proved thus insufficient, he ought to resort to prohibition, when Harold joined them.

'You had better speak to Mr. Graham, Harold. He has been thinking a great deal of you. Go and walk by him,' said his father.

How glad afterwards was Harold to have done so, and to have had those last words from the old man!

'Ah! Master Harold,' he said, 'but it is a blessed service. There's not one action all through—there's not a word uttered nor a thing done—that has not its own meaning. I have realized this all over again to-day, when I have been listening, as it were, for you as well as for myself. Those comfortable words—ah! my laddie, they are for the young as well as for the old. You need them as much as I do. I dare say you observed that they are not quite the same words as we read in the Bible. That's only because they are quoted from an old translation—one which is out of use now. You know, Master Harold, this is the most blessed of all our blessed Church services. Don't neglect it, my son. You will have many temptations to do so, I know. It will be with you, I dare say, at school, as it used to be in our mess-room. There will be many to keep you back, and to laugh at you for going—few perhaps to advise you to go, or to go with you. But be firm, my laddie—be firm. Remember that the strength you will receive at the Lord's Table will preserve your body and soul unto everlasting life.'

'My boy,' he added, as the chair stopped at his door, and Harold took his hand to wish him good-bye, 'my dear Miss

Helen's boy, I am not fit to take such words upon my lips; but they are the desire of my soul for you, and the Lord will hear it and answer it. May the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your heart and mind in the knowledge and love of God, and of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and may the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be with you, and remain with you always.'

And with these words, old David Graham parted from the lad whom he had loved more than any other on earth—more than Charlie Preston, more even than Johnnie Grainger—never to see him again in this life.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

VISITATION OF THE SICK.

In the middle of that same night, or rather towards the early dawn of the next day, the Vicar was roused from sleep by a knock at the door, and, opening his window to inquire who might be there, was answered by the voice of Widow Grainger.

'It's me, sir. I can't stop a moment, for I've left him alone; and I think he's going. But he keeps asking for you, and you bid me come for you at any hour of the day or night that he might want you.'

Ten minutes afterwards, and with the salutation, founded on our Lord's own injunction to His chosen Apostles, 'Peace be to this house, and to all that dwell in it,' the minister entered the little home where old David Graham had dwelt happily for so many years, and which he was now so soon to leave.

Peace was indeed there—the peace that passes all understanding. Every feature of the saintly old man was irradiated by it, as he lay with his face turned towards the window, through which the first rays of the rising sun were stealing, the hoary hairs of his reverend head scarcely a shade less white than the pillow on which it rested.

The long, long race was run at last; the course, which had continued so much beyond the usual time allotted to man for joy and sorrow, for service and for discipline, was

almost finished. Only the last enemy remained to be conquered, and the crown of righteousness would be placed by the hand of the righteous Judge on the head of the brave soldier who had fought so good a fight.

But the end was not so near as was imagined.

The old man had fallen asleep when the Vicar entered, and when, shortly afterwards, he awoke, he seemed revived, and asked for food, not knowing that Mr. Heathcote was sitting beside him—not remembering that an hour before he had earnestly begged Widow Grainger to fetch the minister, telling her, in reply to her remark that 'he was not fit to be left alone,' that 'he was never alone—least of all when only God was with him.'

But this had passed from his mind when he woke from his short sleep and asked for food. The Vicar took his hand and spoke to him, and at the sound of his dear voice old David's countenance brightened yet more.

'I am here, David,' he said—'here to give you the best of all food, the Bread and the Wine which will strengthen you as nothing else can, to take this last step in your earthly journey—the step that will lead you out of the wilderness of this world into the Paradise of God.'

'Am I dying?' he replied. 'Are you sure I am dying?'

Somewhat surprised at not receiving the immediate response which he expected to his words, Mr. Heathcote replied:

'You are drawing near death, no doubt, David. We thought a little while ago that you were sinking, but you have rallied. I do not think the end will be just yet. But surely you would not wish to delay?'

'Only till *she* could come! If there were time to fetch her. If I were sure there would be time for *her* to be with me—Miss Helen—my own dear lady—she that's filled the place in my heart left empty by my bairnies!'

Once more Widow Grainger took her rapid way to the

Vicarage, carrying with her for Mrs. Moorhouse a scrap of paper torn from Mr. Heathcote's pocket-book, and the minister watched beside the old man's bed. Not a word was spoken. The expression of David's face seemed to say that there was no need of any word, even of Christ's minister, where the communion was so close with Christ Himself.

The first interruption to the silent prayers and praises that were ascending from that sick-room was made by Helen Moorhouse, as she entered the room, with such a noiseless step that old David was not aware of her presence until, kneeling beside him, she put her hand in his and asked him for his blessing.

And he gave it with such deep tenderness as he could have given it to none beside his 'own Miss Helen,' except one of those two dear 'lambies' whom the Good Shepherd had gathered to His heavenly Fold so many long years ago.

He gave it almost in the words with which Israel of old, thousands of years before, had given his dying blessing to those dearest to him on earth.

'God bless you, my own dear bairn! The God which has fed me all my life long, and a long life it has been, unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless you! And bless the lad, your laddie, my laddie—God bless him, body and soul, abundantly! Now let the feast be prepared,' he added, still keeping his hand on Helen's head, who knelt on beside his bed; 'let us partake of it together—the holy Feast of Christ's precious Body and Blood.'

Never did Helen forget the impression made upon her mind by that last Communion in old David Graham's sick-room.

Such an intense feeling of the Saviour's presence filled her soul, that she could have imagined herself in the 'upper chamber' where the disciples gathered together with Him

to celebrate His sacrifice in the memorial Feast, and He Himself supported on His bosom the one amongst them who was His intimate friend.

The service over, Mr. Heathcote and Helen left the old man to rest, promising to return in the afternoon, if not summoned before.

'He has rallied strangely,' said Helen, as they left the house. 'I believe he will still live to hear Harold's first letter from school.'

'I think he will,' replied the Vicar. 'My idea is that he will linger through the day and pass away towards morning. It will be a blank in our lives, Helen!'

'Almost the greatest I could know in Little Burton, father, outside the Vicarage walls. No one has ever been to me in this place what he has, or taught me half as much.'

'He says that you have taught him, Helen.'

'We have had many long talks together, father. I think he has given me spiritual teaching, while I have only given him a little information.'

'His mind has always been greedy for knowledge,' said Mr. Heathcote.

'Yes,' said Helen, 'he always longed to understand everything, and was ready to learn anything that anyone could teach him. I remember well one day, when he had been reading about its having been the custom in olden days to anoint the sick with oil upon the forehead or the breast, how exercised he was in mind to know when and why the custom had been discontinued.'

'And rather regretful that it should have been, I dare say. He has always clung very fondly to old customs.'

'He said that he thought outward signs were very useful in making one understand inward graces. I remember the reverent way in which he said, "I often think of St. James's injunction to anoint the sick with oil; and, though I know it's true, as the minister said, that we have not the same

feeling about oil that Eastern folks had, it seems to me a fitting outward sign of the inward graces of light and peace; and I think if *my* breast had been anointed with sacred oil, and it had been poured on *my* forehead, it would have been a sign to me of the unction of the Holy Ghost within my soul, and the enlightening of my blinded understanding by His Light."'

'And you told him, of course, that this custom had only been done away with, like many others, because of the superstitious regard that people were beginning to give to it, looking to the outward sign for that which it had no power to bestow, and forgetting that it was *only* a sign.'

Thus conversing, the Vicar and his daughter returned home to have the door of the Vicarage opened to them by little Winifred almost before they came up to it.

'There was no letter by the first post,' she exclaimed. 'I am waiting for the second.'

'Which will not be here for another half-hour,' replied her mother; 'and you do not even ask how dear old Mr. Graham is!'

'Oh yes, mother, I do! How is he? I was wanting very much to know. Only I do *so* long for Harold's letter! And Mr. Graham longs for it too. He told me so yesterday. How is he, mother?'

'Too near death, I imagine, to live to hear it read, Winnie! And you have done nothing all the morning but think about it. Grandpapa told you it would not come by the first post.'

'He said it was *possible*, mother—just *possible;* but now it is *sure* to come by the second post.'

And the little impatient girl ran back to watch for its coming.

Had she been at home in her quiet village, where the post came in somewhat irregularly, according as the postman had more or less to say to the neighbours whose houses came

before the Rectory, Winifred would have let off the steam of her impatience by running down many hundreds of times to the end of the shrubbery to get the first glimpse of the letter-carrier coming over the hill with his bag upon his shoulder. Being in her grandfather's Vicarage at Little Burton, all she could do was to squeeze her small self into the extreme corner of the bay-window in the drawing-room, from which she could just catch the first sight of the postman's uniform as he turned into the street.

There she had been for nearly an hour in spite of Hannah's remonstrances—first, that it was much too early to expect the post, and then that to watch for him like that was just the way to delay his coming. She had often observed that it was the same with the postman as it was with the kettle—a kettle took all the longer to boil if you stood watching, and a postman always delayed coming if you 'dragged about doing nothing' waiting for him.

Notwithstanding these wise remarks, Winifred returned to her corner as soon as Mrs. Heathcote had carried off her grandfather and mother to the luncheon waiting for them; and after another half-hour's watching she had the delight of receiving from the postman's hands Harold's first letter from school.

It was addressed to his mother, and Winifred, with eager expectant face, stood beside her as she opened it. She had longed for Harold to be happy, sincerely desired that he might not miss her as she had missed him—that he might not be as sorry to be at school as she was to be without him at Little Burton. But her face fell a little when she heard how very happy he was. He wrote lovingly; there were kind messages to her and to everyone, but all regret was swallowed up—at all events for the present—in the delight of being a public-school boy. The very spirit of school life seemed to have come into his soul as he entered the big gates, and he wrote as enthusiastically as though he had

been there for years instead of days. 'Mind and tell Mr. Graham how happy I am. He told me I should like school, and so I do. Give him my love, and tell him so.'

'I hope Mr. Graham will live to hear his message,' said Winifred emphatically.

'We will carry it to him by-and-by, Winnie,' her mother answered. 'We have promised to pay him another visit this evening.'

But before returning to old David's death-bed, an unexpected call came from another and a very different one.

Luncheon was scarcely over when the Vicar was sent for to the house where lay, in almost the last pains of death, the false professor of religion whom, not long before, he had warned away from the Holy Communion. Seized with sudden and dangerous illness, those words of faithful reproof had haunted his mind, until at length the burden became intolerable, and he could find no relief save by sending for the clergyman, unburdening his mind to him, and imploring him to help him to find pardon and peace. His confession was so complete, the bitter things that he wrote against himself were so evidently sincere, his soul was so full of the hard trouble laid upon it by the sense of God's wrath, his penitence was so unfeigned, and his heart so deeply humbled, that the Vicar felt assured that it was the convincing power of God's own Spirit that had thus brought home to his soul the threats contained in the Holy Scriptures. It belonged not to him to break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax, but to direct his mind to the promises of that blessed Lord whose pity and compassion are infinite,

The time was past for hoping that God would heal all his distempers in this life, and give him strength against future temptations. But there is no limit to the grace of God, so far as man can judge, and whilst the life remains in the body there is always hope that the bones which He has

broken may yet rejoice. No one can draw much comfort from a death-bed repentance ; for there is no true sign of a new heart except the sign of a new life. But the man's penitence appeared so sincere, that the Vicar trusted that God had, in the multitude of His mercies, considered his contrition and accepted his tears, and in this hope he received his confession and administered to him the Blessed Sacrament.

A striking contrast was David Graham's death-bed to this painful scene, when the Vicar and his daughter again stood beside it.

'He has rallied yet more since you left,' said Widow Grainger. 'He was longing for you to come.'

'I want to hear you read the Visitation Service once more,' the old man interrupted.

And the Vicar read it, pausing once or twice as he did so, but only to be asked by David to go on : 'he was not tired ; every word was of comfort.'

'Read it all,' he said, when he stopped half-way through the exhortation. 'That twelfth chapter of Hebrews has been my favourite reading ever since the Lord laid His fatherly Hand upon me with the chastening of blindness. Ah ! I have learned that God only visits us for our good. His chastisements are the instruments of His love. It does not matter what the instrument may be, the end the Great Physician has in view is always the same—not His pleasure, but our profit ; to cut away the evil, and to purify the good, to remove the obstacles that impede our soul's progress, and to clear the way to life eternal, making us like Christ by teaching us to suffer after His example, patiently and humbly. Read it all, sir.'

And Mr. Heathcote read it all, and afterwards rehearsed every article of Christian Faith. Never could those present forget the tone in which David replied to those solemn inquiries:

'"All this I steadfastly believe."'

Evidently that service was no new study to old David. Perhaps no part of all his beloved Church Service could have fallen more familiarly on his ears, so often, in the days when he had been able to read them, had those prayers and that exhortation formed subject-matter for communion with his God, and secret, searching self-examination. Of all the Psalms—and we know how dearly David loved the Psalter—none had, perhaps, been so precious to him of late years as that seventy-first, which he now heard for the last time.

The period of old age had been so long to him, the failure of his strength had been a work of so many years, the gray hairs had so long become snowy-white, that few could have offered more frequently the petition that He Who had been his hope from his youth, and had holden him up ever since he was born, would be his house of defence and his castle to the very end.

'Mary tells me the sun is setting,' he said, as the Vicar ended the service, 'and I am sinking with it, to see a new sun rise in its glory, the blessed Sun of righteousness. There's many a year that old David's eyes have been closed. But they will soon be opened now, and the first sight they will rest upon will be the Saviour's face. No more darkness then for ever. All is light in the holy city. The Lord God giveth them light. The glory of God doth lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.'

And then he asked if there had been news of the young master, and listened attentively while Harold's letter was read to him.

After this there was a return of the faintness he had had at dawn, and the minister read the commendatory prayer—not knowing whether he was conscious or not, until he reached the end, when they were almost startled by the emphatic tone with which he said 'Amen.' Then, in a perfectly distinct

voice, though feeble and interrupted by weakness, he added :

'Tell him—the laddie—to keep clear of them—the defilements. There are many of them. It's a naughty world—the lusts of the flesh—the wiles of Satan are hard to overcome—hardest for the young like him—tell him whilst he lives to keep his heart applied to the holy and heavenly wisdom. It will bring him in the end, as it is bringing old David Graham now, to life everlasting, through the merits of Jesus Christ.'

Then he lay still, so still that they held their own breath to listen to his, as it came slowly and faintly, so slowly and so faintly that they were expecting every one to be the last, when to their surprise he said, joining as by a last effort the withered hands that lay on the coverlet, in the attitude of prayer :

'Into Thy hands I commend my spirit, my faithful Creator and most merciful Saviour.'

And with these words his soul, washed white in the blood of the immaculate Lamb, slain to take away the sins of the world, was by Him presented pure and without spot before Almighty God. The Lord was old David's everlasting light, and he saw the King in His beauty.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

HOLY MATRIMONY.

The bells of the parish church of Uxminster had never rung a merrier peal than that which fell on the ears of the wedding-party that issued from its porch on this June morning, when the sun was shining brightly, and the birds singing, and everything seemed to have assumed its gayest mood.

But merrily as the bells rang, they brought much mournfulness and no mirth to more than one heart in that gaily attired party, and many words passed amongst them which were neither of congratulation nor rejoicing.

The bride, indeed, looked as beamingly happy as any fair bride that ever the sun shone upon, and perhaps no sun ever shone upon a much fairer. Evidently such had been the bridegroom's opinion, as his eye, critical and hard to please, rested on the lovely young creature who had just become his wife.

It was a saying amongst Alfred Dent's friends that he always detected some fault everywhere, especially when it was a question of personal beauty or of dress; but for once, when his eye rested on Minnie Davis as she came up the aisle, leaning on John Grainger's arm, to take her place beside him, the expression of his countenance was of entire pride and satisfaction.

John Grainger took note of it, as, indeed, for long he had

taken note of every look and every word of Alfred Dent's that came under his observation, and he felt the task he was about to perform more hateful than ever.

Why should he have been asked to give this woman to this man? Why should the iron that had pierced his soul be driven deeper in by every circumstance connected with this marriage?

Yet, when Minnie, utterly unconscious of every feeling within his mind, had come to him a few days before, and asked him to undertake this office for her, he had consented at once.

'I have no father and no mother,' she said; 'no near relations at all. You have been like a brother to me all my life, Johnnie, and I am sure you will do this for me.'

And he did it, no word or look betraying what it cost him. But as his eyes rested on the waiting bridegroom, the feelings of dislike and contempt for him, which for many months now it had been the constant effort of his life to repress, were struggling within him more fiercely than ever.

'He does not love her,' he said to himself; 'I don't believe he knows what love is. He is proud of her beauty; he desires to possess her for his wife; but he has no real, true, pure affection for her—none. He does not care for her one quarter as much as he cares for his own sinful self. And she—*how* she loves him!'

How, indeed! There was a whole heart full of present love—a whole lifetime of future devotion expressed in the one timid glance with which she had raised her lovely eyes to his—to his, which at that moment were so occupied in scrutinizing her personal appearance from head to foot, that the glance had not even met with a response.

Mr. Moorhouse had read the service. It was a disappointment to Minnie that Mr. Heathcote, who had been asked to come over from Little Burton for that

purpose, had not done so. But he was not well; and though he might have been equal to the effort, he had not cared to make it. So he was not present, and Mrs. Heathcote had remained with him. But though these were disappointments to Minnie Davis, she scarcely felt them as such in this day of supreme happiness.

Some months before, when this approaching marriage was still a subject of much sorrowful discussion to many of those most interested in it, Ruth Prescott had remarked to her stepmother that 'it was useless to argue any further with Minnie, for nothing could dissuade her from marrying Alfred Dent, she was so "dreadfully in love" with him.'

And Mrs. Heathcote had made reply:

'Yes, that is just the word; she is "dreadfully" in love.'

This morning Ruth remembered this little conversation, and she repeated it to Mr. Prescott as she returned home with her husband to give the bride and bridegroom their breakfast, before they left for their short wedding tour.

'You look quite ill, my darling,' her husband had said, knowing well what made her look so; for often had they discussed this marriage together, as they realized all that was wrong in it, all that was mistaken, all the sorrow that was likely to arise from it, doubting how far they ought to carry their disapproval of it, or what part it would be right to take in it.

'I feel ill,' she said, 'and so thankful to you that there is to be no party, as Mr. Dent so much wished. I owe that to you, Leonard.'

'Yes,' he replied; 'there was no necessity for that. It was quite as much as they could expect of us to be present at the ceremony.'

'It was quite as much as I could do to keep up a cheerful appearance, especially during that solemn exhortation, Leonard.'

'It is very solemn,' he replied.

But even he did not understand how powerfully it had struck home to Ruth's heart, with fully as much solemnity as when addressed to herself, perhaps even more; for on that occasion the consciousness that God had given her strength to resist a great evil in the past, and was rewarding her now with a great good, had been the prevailing thought in her soul.

But this morning, the reading of those awful words had carried her back to the day, many years ago, when her father had, with God's blessing on his effort, settled for her a sore heart-struggle by means of that same solemn exhortation.

Taking a Prayer-book from the table, he had read this exhortation to her, and had said:

'Ruth, my dear, dear child! listen to these words: seek to set aside all earthly desires and feelings, and to think only of that dreadful Day of Judgment. It will, indeed, be a dreadful day for those who have wilfully put from them God's express Commandments, and preferred the gratification of their temporal hopes and wishes to their soul's welfare. You know God's Word—you know how often I have sought earnestly to impress upon you, and Helen, and every other young girl entrusted to my spiritual charge, that if they who *are* God's servants join themselves in marriage with those who are *not*, their marriage is not lawful in His sight, however lawful it may be in man's sight. It is true, Ruth,' he had added, 'that this solemn charge in the Marriage Service refers to impediments—such impediments as would make the marriage illegal in a Christian country. But addressed to one of God's children, it bears another interpretation also. For God's Word to His servants is very explicit. It allows of no mistake, Ruth. "Only in the Lord" are Christians to marry. There is to be no yoking of themselves with unbelievers.'

With these words, a very tender fatherly embrace, and an earnest prayer that 'God would teach her what was right and strengthen her to do it,' Mr. Heathcote had left her that day—left her first to sink down on the floor in bitter, bitter weeping, then to endure a long heart-struggle with her own soul and with God—to find her, some hours afterwards, pale and worn indeed, but very peaceful, and to be asked by her to 'give that note for her, for she could not give it herself—but she knew that he was right.'

From that day to this the subject had never been mentioned, but it was as present in Ruth's mind as if it had all happened yesterday; and Mr. Prescott knew that it was, as they walked home together, talking of Minnie's wilful resolve to marry Alfred Dent, notwithstanding all she knew against his character.

'The service seemed such a mockery,' she said—'that beautiful service which I have never heard before without being struck by its beauty.'

'Because, perhaps,' he answered, 'you have not been accustomed to hear it read except in the case of those who are true, living members of Christ's Church.'

'Yes,' she replied; 'that is true. I have been to so few marriages, and they have all been such happy ones—mother's and Helen's and Mrs. Abbott's. I was only a little thing when father married again, but I remember the wedding perfectly, and how lovely our new mother—as he called her—looked. I don't mean what people generally call lovely, for I know she is not really very pretty—but so sweet and calm and good. You know, Leonard, my little heart had gone out in love to her the very first day I saw her, before I even knew that father was engaged to her; and on her wedding-day it seemed to me as if it must have been our own dear mother who, in some way or other, had sent her to take care of us. I was always fond of fancying things, especially about heaven and paradise. Mine was such a

happy childhood that I often thought it must be because there were so many good angels round me—and that day I remember thinking that perhaps our mother had asked that some one very good and lovely might be told to take care of her little children on earth.'

'In which case, Ruthie, the mission would certainly have been well fulfilled.'

'Indeed it would, Leonard. I have often thought, long since I left my childish days behind, how lovingly, when they are both together in Paradise, our own mother will thank her for all she has done for us on earth.'

'Yes,' he said; 'your father's marriage has indeed been a happy, holy one; as blessed, I believe, as has ever taken place since God created Adam and Eve, and sanctified and joined them together in holy marriage. No marriage that I have ever known could be a more fitting type of the mystical union between Christ and His Church—the man loving his wife, according to God's Word, as Christ loved His Church, who gave Himself for it, loving and cherishing it even as His own flesh;—the woman loving and amiable, faithful and obedient to her husband in all quietness and sobriety and peace. You know, Ruth, how often I have said that your mother was to me just a living illustration of that sentence in the Prayer-book—"a follower of holy and godly matrons."'

Ruth looked up smilingly into her husband's face.

'I wish I were like her,' she said.

He could not tell her that she was, for no two Christian women, whose hearts were both full of love to God and man, and whose lives were consequently guided by the very highest principle, could well have been more unlike than his eager, impulsive young wife, and her calm, self-possessed step-mother.

'No,' he said; 'you and your mother are quite as complete counterparts as you and I are.'

'And is it not good of God to have given me a counterpart?' she said. 'I wonder what would have become of me if I had not had some one to hold me in check?'

'To act as a drag on your impetuosity,' he answered. 'I wonder what I should do often, Ruthie, in what you call my fits of "dumps," if I had not a bright little wife to act as a spur, to rekindle fading hopes and inspire fresh energy? I think—indeed, I am sure—that God has given each what each requires.'

'I wonder if He is giving Minnie what she requires?' said Ruth.

'No doubt He is, if she is God's child, as you believe her to be.'

'Yes,' said Ruth; 'in spite of her wilfulness and worldliness, I believe she really is.'

'And so God is letting her have her own way on purpose to teach her by it, giving her, perhaps, the desire of her heart in order to send the leanness into her soul which will be the means of bringing it back to Him.'

'You are not much of a comforter, Leonard.'

'Am I not?' he said. 'I did not mean not to be. It seems to me that in such a marriage as Minnie's there is only this comfort left: the hope that the discipline which I am *sure* it will bring to her, and the sorrow which she is laying up for herself, may be of use to her soul.'

'You have a very bad opinion of Alfred Dent, Leonard.'

'Very, Ruth.'

'And yet some people do not think so badly of him, Leonard.'

'Because they do not know him as I do, who have, for Minnie's sake, really searched into his life. It is the very hypocrisy of his nature, which makes him succeed so well in hiding his vices and displaying his simulated virtues, that makes me so hopeless. But we need not talk any more

about him. There can be no possible use in doing so now.'

'No,' replied Ruth; 'it only makes one more sad. I am thankful they are going to settle near us. I may one day be of some comfort to Minnie.'

CHAPTER XXXIX.

HOLY MATRIMONY.

MEANWHILE another couple were returning together to the same house, their conversation turning naturally on the same subject; and yet, natural as it was to speak of it, almost necessary, indeed, under the circumstances, both would gladly have avoided it, had it been possible to do so, albeit from very different feelings—feelings which neither in the least suspected to have any existence in the heart of the other.

John Grainger, his unwelcome task over, followed Mr. and Mrs. Prescott's example in shaking hands with the bride and bridegroom, and then, joining Ruth's pretty maid Esther, who had been Minnie Davis's one bridesmaid, walked with her down the aisle and back to the house.

Very pretty she looked in her simple white dress and hat—almost prettier, some had said, than the bride. But John Grainger's mind had been far too occupied with regret and anxiety for the one to have any thought of the other.

He was so preoccupied, indeed, that he would have found it difficult to rouse himself from his own thoughts to pay proper attention to his companion if Esther had not uttered aloud the very words which were in his mind.

'Poor Minnie!'

'Why poor Minnie?' he asked, looking steadily at her. At all times his dark eyes were full of earnestness. Some-

how or other they were the only eyes Esther had ever seen whose steady gaze she could not return with the open, honest look which was natural to her. Now her own fell beneath their searching, anxious expression, and he repeated the question before she answered :

'I hope she may be happy.'

'And you do not think she will? Why not?'

'I don't know,' she said. 'I hope she may be. I don't like Mr. Dent.'

'And you do like her?' he asked. 'You are great friends.'

Esther hesitated.

'I think we might have been,' she said, her honesty, as was often the case, making it difficult to give an unhesitating answer. 'She is very sweet and lovely. I was very fond of her at one time.'

'But you have grown less so,' said John, pursuing the subject in a way that was strangely unlike his usual diffidence. 'You do not find her as worthy of regard as you imagined?'

'Oh no!' exclaimed Esther. 'Oh no, that is not it.' And then, her generosity getting the better of her shyness, she added : 'I have always thought her lovely, as lovely in her ways as she is in looks, only I think, I am afraid I have been a little jealous of her; and I do think—don't you?—that when one is jealous of anyone, it prevents one from being fond of them as one might otherwise be; and perhaps, too, it makes one a little unjust towards them.'

'But,' replied John, who had long ago come to the conclusion that if Minnie was the very embodiment of all that was beautiful and fascinating, Esther was the very essence of all that was good, 'I should not have thought you could be jealous of anyone, however beautiful and clever she might be.'

'Oh, I don't mean of her beauty or cleverness,' said

Esther. 'I never saw any girl like her for both, but I hope I should never be jealous of such things as those. Only, you see, Mr. Grainger——'

Esther hesitated, and John said quickly:

'No, I don't see. One can't judge of others, I know; but I should have thought your circumstances were happier than hers. You have a good father and mother, and brothers and sisters, and she is so entirely without anyone of her very own. And you are so fond of those lovely little children, and of Mrs. Prescott.'

'And Mrs. Prescott is so fond of *her!*' said Esther.

'And you were jealous of that?'

'I am afraid I was.'

It certainly was the truth, if not the whole truth.

'I can feel for you,' said John. 'You love Mrs. Prescott very much; and I don't wonder at it. I have known her all my life, you know; and I have never seen any lady like her. She was just like what she is now when I was a young lad in her class at the Little Burton Sunday-school, and we boys half worshipped her—she was always so bright and good, and never minded what trouble she took for us. I don't wonder at your love for her, especially after living with her so many years. You may well be fond of her.'

'Too fond, I am afraid. I think I have *quite* worshipped her, Mr. Grainger.'

'Don't call me Mr. Grainger—call me John; we know each other well enough now for that,' he said. And then, not even noticing the colour which had been called into Esther's face by a request which nothing would have made her comply with, he added: 'And I can quite understand your jealousy, too. It is hard to see others preferred before us when we love very much. And I suppose there is no great love without jealousy.'

He spoke with such feeling that this time Esther did raise her eyes to his, and the look of sympathy with which they

met changed the pleasant liking that John had long felt for her into a real strong regard.

They had reached the door of Mr. Prescott's house, and John had shaken hands and wished her good-bye, when he turned back for another word.

'That sweet, good girl,' he had said to himself, 'knows something—only a little perhaps, but something—of what I have suffered. I wish I could be a help to her. Jealousy is a maddening feeling, and I don't think there is anything that would drive one further from God, if His grace did not enable one to overcome it.'

'You must not be down-hearted, Esther,' he said, 'or let any over-love of anyone be a temptation to you. It's hard work, I know. I can't help telling you how much I feel for you. It's only those who have gone through it that *can* tell what jealousy is—or love either. But God's grace is sufficient for anything. I hope we shall be great friends, Esther; it will be a help to me, I know, and I should like to think it might be a help to you.'

He had made a great effort in overcoming all natural reserve in his desire to establish a real friendship with this good girl for whom he felt such sympathy, and he was thrown back upon himself. The hand which he held out for a second parting shake was taken coldly. Esther felt that John Grainger would never be any help to her, but only the reverse, and the friendship for which he expressed so much desire seemed by this conversation removed to a greater distance than before.

Her disposition was by nature an equable one, and long heart-discipline had rendered her still more self-controlled, so that she knew little of the extremes of vivacity and depression in one or other of which Minnie Davis generally existed; but this morning her heart had sunk strangely low—lower than she could ever remember it to have sunk before.

Mrs. Prescott was standing in the hall when she came in, and they went up together to the nursery, where their little charges had been left to the temporary care of a housemaid.

At the first glimpse of his mother, Godfrey allowed the high pile of bricks which he had been building, wherewith to astonish her, as the closest resemblance his imagination could conceive to the Tower of Babel, to tumble headlong to the floor, and running to meet her, he clung to her dress in delight at her return. But though she held out her arms to Baby Frances, the rosy little maiden turned away from her mother to extend hers to Esther; and as she clung tightly round her nurse's neck, and pressed her dimpled cheek to hers, happiness and peace returned to Esther's heart. It was good of God to give her the love of this little child to heal her wounds.

Mrs. Prescott carried off Godfrey with her to have his dinner at his parents' luncheon.

As the nursery-door closed upon them, Esther sat down in the low chair and rocked herself to and fro with Baby in her arms, the tears flowing freely down her cheeks. A little dimpled hand was raised to wipe them away, and a sweet baby-voice said:

'Nan-na no cry! Good nan-na! Nan-na no cry!'

And Esther dried her tears, and putting Baby Frances down on the floor, gave her the flowers to pull to pieces which John Grainger had presented to her, and prepared to lay aside her wedding attire and return to her nursery duties.

That evening seemed like old times to Esther, and, though she reproached herself for it, she could not have prevented the feeling of relief it was to her to be again alone in her nursery, when Mrs. Prescott came in to give the children her last look and kiss for the night, and stayed a little while to talk, as was her custom. How pleasant those nursery talks used to be to Esther's soul before Minnie

Davis had come to live with them and make a third, where before there had been but two! How pleasant they had been, even when first she came, until somehow it had grown to be only Mrs. Prescott and Minnie who talked, while Esther had felt shut out altogether!

And yet it never appeared to be Minnie's fault. She never seemed to have, nor, indeed, had she ever any wish to exclude Esther, but she was so bright and clever and fascinating, almost always knowing a great deal more about everything than Esther knew, and never afraid of putting forth her opinions, as Esther was even when she did know—perhaps sometimes better than Minnie. And, then, Mrs. Prescott was, as Esther had said to John Grainger, 'so *very* fond of her.' And they had so much sympathy together; so many subjects of interest concerning which Esther knew nothing; the 'do you remember'—that special charm in friendship—was so often on their lips.

It was wrong, and selfish—a sin to be struggled against and overcome; but the light of that happy nursery had been greatly dimmed of late to Esther; and this evening, notwithstanding her sympathy for Minnie, and her self-reproaches on the subject of her absence, she felt much more at her ease, much more like her old happy self, as she sat alone at her sewing, when her mistress came in.

And if the pleasure she felt at getting back those long fair tresses into her own hands and brushing them out once more was a little childish, it was most delightful—so delightful that she could have let her tears fall on them for very pleasure.

'You will have more to do now, Esther,' said Mrs. Prescott, 'with your lady's-maid duties restored to you again, and two children instead of one to look after.'

She had been thinking that some addition to Esther's wages should be made now that Minnie Davis would no longer be with them to help her in personal attention to her-

self and in needlework, but on the first hint of this, Esther exclaimed:

'Oh no; please not to think of that, ma'am. I could not bear it. I am only too glad to come back to my duties. And you know, ma'am, there are no little babies to attend to now.'

And looking up at Esther, surprised to hear the excited tone in which the quiet girl uttered these words, Mrs. Prescott was yet more surprised to see her eyes full of tears.

The truth flashed across her mind for the first time. She was glad not to have known it before, when the knowledge might have interfered with her own pleasant treatment of both the girls, but she was glad that it had come out now. And so was Esther. That Mrs. Prescott should have suspected any other source of jealousy in her mind towards Minnie Davis would have filled her with shame. That was a secret hidden even from her own heart, save when a glimpse of it shot itself suddenly into sight with a short sharp pain, and was instantly shut out again. But this secret she was glad for Mrs. Prescott to know. They drew it out together into the light, and took it to pieces, until scarcely a portion of it remained worthy of attention.

Once more were the words uttered which had been already said many times that day.

'Poor Minnie!' said Mrs. Prescott. 'I am afraid, Esther, there is more reason for pitying her than for envying her just now.'

'I am afraid so, too, ma'am,' Esther replied. 'I am sure Mr. Dent is not at all a nice man. But perhaps he will be very different now he is married, if he is really very fond of Minnie.'

'We must hope so, Esther, *if* he is; though, even then, I doubt very much whether the love of a man such as he seems to be ever lasts very long. The duration of anything depends upon the materials of which it is made, as you and

I, Esther, have often seen. Things carelessly put together, or made of slight material, cannot be expected to hold. And things wrongly put together are very difficult to set right afterwards. I confess to being very anxious, very unhappy, about poor Minnie. You must help me to pray for her, Esther.'

And in all sincerity of heart Esther promised to do so

CHAPTER XL.

HOLY MATRIMONY.

In the pretty parlour of a very pleasant house, situated just outside the town, young Mrs. Alfred Dent was busily engaged in arranging flowers, carrying on her graceful work in a way that showed that her artistic eye and light fingers had lost nothing of their taste and skill since last we saw her, which was on her wedding-morning.

Yet, busy as she was with her pretty work, filling vase after vase from the basket, which seemed to contain an endless supply of roses and mignonette, and sweet peas and pansies, it evidently was not the subject that occupied her mind; for she constantly stopped, sometimes to stand buried in thought, holding a vase in her hand, with a far-away look in her eyes—at others, to gaze out of one or other of the windows, which, on this side of the house, had no outlook save into the dull, dusty street, though on the other side they looked into the pleasantest of gardens, at this moment rich both in scent and hue.

At length, just as she had filled her last vase, the sound of wheels made itself heard, and, setting aside her basket and looking round the room to see that all was to her taste, and to the still more fastidious taste of him for whom she waited, she took up her position at one of the front windows, standing just behind the soft creamy curtain, and watched as cab after cab rolled past from the railway-station.

There were not many, and soon all had rolled down the street, but not one had stopped at her door. There would not be another train for four hours. Perhaps he would come by the next, or perhaps he would not. The latter was the more probable. Her husband had so often fixed the day and hour of his return; she had so often arranged flowers in those vases, so often stood beside that curtain, and so often been disappointed. But it could not be helped. It was not his fault. In his business, even when he was only carrying on his daily work in the warehouse, it was impossible to tell when he might be detained, or when he might be spared; and when, as was often now the case, he was sent by his employers into some other part of the country on business, he never knew himself when he should get back. It was trying work, and had become more so during these last months, when Minnie had not been in good health, and often felt very painfully the loss of the sympathy and companionship, and especially of the petting and attention, which her husband had given her during the first months of her married life. Only during those first few months—for afterwards business had become a more serious matter. Often when at home he seemed too preoccupied with it to have much thought or care for anything else, whilst the 'work out of hours' detained him constantly at Mr. Greer's far into the night. He was paid extra for it, he said; and certainly he often brought her expensive presents—the result of this extra labour; but Minnie would gladly have foregone these, if by doing so she could have secured more of her husband's society, and saved herself some of the lonely hours which of late had grown harder and harder to bear. But this, Alfred assured her, was impossible. If he did not do this extra work, some one else would, and he would lose the place he held in the favour of his employers, and with it his chance of preferment. She did not understand business, and he did, and all she had to do was to believe him and trust him,

and look forward to the time when he should have made the fortune which they would enjoy together. This he often declared himself to be in a good way of soon doing, and Minnie fully believed him. She would have done so, indeed, just as fully even if she had not seen proof of it in the rolls of bank-notes which she occasionally saw in his hands, and in these same handsome gifts which from time to time he brought to her, and for which somehow she seemed to care less and less. Not one of them gave her half the pleasure that she had felt when, in bygone days, Alfred had gathered a flower and fastened it into her dress—a rich velvety pansy, 'to match her eyes,' as he would say, or a delicately-shaded rose, 'to rival the colour in her cheeks.' Those days were all gone now. The presents were all proofs that he was getting on like a house on fire—that it would be ridiculous to complain of his late hours, or her solitary evenings, when he was making money hand-over-hand. No remembrance even seemed to remain in his mind of the pleasant summer evenings when he returned from his office, the moment he could get away from it, in order to take her for a stroll beside the river, or to help her with her gardening, or of the almost pleasanter winter evenings, spent in reading, and singing, and playing. All these days were long ago forgotten by him, but every day they deepened in her mind into yet more vivid remembrance.

To-night the thought of them filled her soul as she shut down the front windows, which only admitted dust and glare into the room, drew down the blinds, and opened the back windows, letting in a number of sweet scents, and opening to her sight a number of pleasant objects, which two years ago would have made her ready to sing for joy.

But now she neither cared for scent of sweetly-perfumed flowers, nor sight of harmoniously-blended colours, or sound of softly-singing birds. Disappointed and disheartened, lonely and tired, she felt equally sick in body and mind.

Her work-table stood just inside the pleasant window, some pretty baby-work on which she had been employed lying upon it, but she had no heart to take it up again. Sinking down into the low chair, which had been one of her husband's first presents, she covered her face with her hands, and was on the very point of giving way to a violent fit of crying, when the front-door bell rang, and she started up to hear Esther's voice inquiring of the servant 'if Mrs. Dent were at home?'

Had there been time to do so, Minnie would have stepped into the passage and desired the maid to say that she was engaged. She had shrunk much of late from seeing anyone, and—though she could not have told why—especially from seeing Esther. But before she had opened the door of her drawing-room, as she called it, her visitors were in the hall, and in another moment Esther was giving her the basket of peaches that Mrs. Prescott had sent her, and making inquiries for her health, which Minnie answered by the assurance that she was quite well. However pale her cheeks had grown, however large and weary her eyes looked, however weak she felt, Minnie Dent never allowed herself to be anything but 'perfectly well.' To acknowledge any other feeling would have been to confess that she felt disappointed and neglected and miserable.

'Thank Mrs. Prescott very much, and tell her I am quite well,' she said, as she set aside the fruit with just a passing thought that if Alfred came that night it would be a nice addition to the supper—he was so fond of peaches.

But though she was all alone, and going to remain so until eleven o'clock that night, she did not ask Esther and the children to stay, or express any wish that Esther would come back and keep her company whilst her husband was away. This she used often to do in past days; but of late, although her thoughts were anything but pleasant companions, Minnie preferred remaining with them to the

wearisome effort of striving to keep them out of sight whilst she forced herself to talk of other things in which she felt no interest.

So Esther took the children home, or rather she was on her way to do so, when the interruption occurred which made that summer evening the most eventful of all that had ever yet happened in Esther's quiet, uneventful life, where any excitement or disturbance that had ever come had been carried on in the secret places of her own soul, unseen by any, unsuspected even by those whom she called her nearest and dearest friends.

A note had to be carried to the Rectory for Mrs. Prescott, and they had just left it, when Godfrey exclaimed:

'There's Mr. Grainger. I am going to stop for him.'

Esther objected, but it was Godfrey's way to be self-willed, and it was Esther's wisdom to avoid a combat in which she knew she would be conquered, or in which she could only win by a conflict for which the public road was scarcely a fitting scene.

'I like to talk to Mr. Grainger,' said the little fellow, in the determined tone natural to him, 'and father always lets me. Father says I may *always* speak to Mr. Grainger, and walk with him whenever I choose.'

And Mr. Grainger coming up at that moment, the boy appealed to him as to whether this were not the case. But though John answered in the affirmative, he appeared by no means equally anxious to avail himself of the privilege of walking with the young gentleman, or talking to him, for he scarcely seemed to hear a word the little fellow said, and the answers he returned were so strangely irrelevant to the questions asked, that Esther wondered what could be the cause, having indeed no suspicion that her appearance at that moment had so taken John Grainger by surprise as completely to throw him off his usually peculiarly steady equilibrium. All through that summer day, during which,

however, he had been busy in making numerous calculations, and had not been guilty of a single mistake in anyone of them, his thoughts had turned at every leisure moment to what he had resolved—steadfastly, prayerfully resolved—to do before night.

As he locked the door of Mr. Prescott's office and put the key in his pocket, he left behind in it all thought of everything except this resolve, to which he had now been coming for several weeks, and he was busy thinking how best to carry it into execution, when little Godfrey's voice roused him from his meditations, and he looked up to see the subject of them a few yards in front of him. His first impulse was to turn back, to return home another way; but this could not be. He was the bearer of a tin case of papers and plans which Mr. Prescott had commissioned him to bring to his house without fail that evening, when he himself had left the office early in the afternoon to take Ruth for a drive. So he went on towards the party in front of him, Godfrey meanwhile planting himself upright on the pavement, his little feet placed firmly together, and his light, straight figure posed in an amusing attitude of command while he exclaimed:

'Come on, Mr. Grainger; I am waiting to walk with you.'

So John Grainger came on, and the little party were proceeding together on their homeward way when, to the great relief of both the elders, another interruption occurred; for just as they were turning out of the street, they came upon Mr. and Mrs. Prescott turning into it.

Mr. Prescott had some messages for John. Mrs. Prescott turned to Esther.

'You have just taken the note, I suppose. You need not have gone, for we have returned so early from the country that we are going up to the Rectory ourselves.'

Of course Godfrey wanted to go too. When did he not

want to go with his mother? Even 'Mr. Grainger' was not a sufficiently powerful attraction to keep him away from her. And, for a wonder, little Frances begged her mother to take her too. Young as she was still, perhaps she had already discovered that, devoted as her 'nanna' was to her, she still did not give her the entire attention of her ears and eyes when Mr. Grainger was there. Anyhow, she begged to go too, and Mr. Prescott said:

'We will take them both. It is a lovely evening, and we shall not be long.'

So the children turned back with their parents, and Esther and John went on their way together. John might have asked Esther to take charge of the tin case of plans, but he did not. Nor did she offer to do so. They walked on side by side, talking first of Minnie Dent, and the visit which Esther had just paid her, and then of other things—until suddenly, unintentionally, John came upon the one subject which was filling his own mind to the exclusion of every other. What he said, or what Esther answered, we need not stop to tell. Some things sweet enough in the telling and the hearing do not well bear repeating.

Suffice it to say that two hearts, long shut up, were opened to each other during the course of that short walk, and joined in one sweet stream of love, and sympathy, and confidence, which was to know no future separation in time, or through all eternity.

'And you are *quite* sure you love me now?' was Esther's last word as they parted.

'Quite!' was the only answer.

But the tone in which it was uttered, and the look which accompanied it, would have been quite enough to have driven every fear, or doubt, or jealous recollection of the past completely out of Esther's heart, if any had remained there.

CHAPTER XLI.

HOLY MATRIMONY.

Mr. Abbott sat in his arm-chair, at his writing-table in his comfortable study, an open letter in his hand, his face deadly white with some evidently unexpected and very strong emotion.

Little Margery, running in from the garden as it was her custom to do every morning at the same hour, with the flower in her hand which it was her daily delight to fasten into his button-hole, receiving for payment the fatherly kiss which she claimed, stopped short and looked wonderingly at him for an instant. Then, a sudden terror seizing her, she dropped the flower, and ran to tell the butler that her father was very ill; her first thought, even in that moment of fright, being to save her mother all sudden alarm.

But before the faithful man-servant, who had been with Mr. Abbott and his father before him for twenty years, had reached the study, his master had regained his self-possession, which the servant never remembered having seen him lose before.

'What has become of Miss Margery?' he said. 'I think she came in just now, and went away before I could speak to her.'

'Yes, sir; she thought you were ill.'

'Not ill,' he said; 'but I have had bad news, Smythson.'

He did not say of what kind, and Smythson was not the

man to inquire. But mentally he said, 'From New York'; for he had noticed which of the letters he had placed upon his master's table lay open there now, and his mind misgave him as to what the nature of those evil tidings might be. He had not lived twenty years in the family without knowing a good deal of its affairs. Moreover, Smythson was a clear discerner of character, which Mr. Abbott was not, in spite of his thorough knowledge of business, and he had never cared for the junior partner in the firm, of whom he had seen a great deal in America, or had quite liked the amount of trust that Mr. Abbott placed in him, or the full power which he fancied he gave him in the administration of his affairs on the other side of the Atlantic.

Many thoughts in connection with this prejudice sprang rapidly to his mind at the sight of that open letter with the New York postmark and his master's white face, but all he said was to inquire whether 'there was anything he could do for him?'

'You can go down to the Vicarage, Smythson, and ask the Vicar if he can come in and speak to me as soon as possible, and you can send Miss Margery back to me. Your mistress is having her breakfast, I suppose?'

'Yes, sir. Hartley was taking it up to her as I came along the hall.'

'And Miss Margery is not with her?'

'No, sir. She went up to the nursery when she sent me to you. She begged me not to say that you were ill, for fear of frightening the mistress.'

'Just like her,' said Mr. Abbott. 'She has more thought for others—child as she is—than her father.'

And yet it was only thought for others—anxiety for wife and child—that had made that strong heart give way even for a moment. Had he stood alone, he could have begun the world over again with scarcely a regret; but for them!—his

invalid wife, whose very life, the doctors declared, depended on the enjoyment of every possible comfort and luxury, and on the most entire freedom from every shadow of care and anxiety; and little Margery, who had been nurtured in the very lap of luxury from her birth, and who was, moreover, a fragile little plant herself, far more fit for tender nursing in sheltered places than for any contest with a hard, rough world.

'Father has had bad news, darling,' he said, as Margery reappeared, a fresh flower in her hand, which she first fastened into his coat, and then, mounting on his knee, where she often used to say she would 'never, never be too old to sit,' she stroked his face and beard, and kissed his hands.

'Mother must not know,' was the child's first reply. 'Hartley says she is so weak to-day.' And then she asked, 'Is anyone ill, father?'

'No, darling; not ill.'

'Has anyone been wicked, father?'

'I am afraid so, Margery; but you could not understand about it just yet.'

And then, as he saw Mr. Heathcote coming through the shrubbery in ready response to Smythson's message, he kissed her tenderly and said:

'Can I trust my little maid to go to mother now, and take great care of her till I come? Tell her I shall not be long, but the Vicar has come to speak to me on business.'

'Oh yes, father. I am going to get some lovely flowers, and put my little table by her bed while I arrange them for her; and I know I can take care of her, and keep her amused.'

Half an hour afterwards, and Mr. Abbott came into his wife's room so perfectly composed, and looking so much like his usual calm self, that Margery came to the conclusion that the Vicar had set to rights whatever was wrong, which

she believed he possessed an extraordinary power of doing, and she ran off to her morning lessons with a mind quite relieved from anxiety.

Mr. Abbott took her place by the bedside. It was impossible to conceal the news he had received, or to delay the telling of it, even if it had been right to do so. And she must hear the tidings from himself. The Vicar had offered to tell her, but he had not wished him to do so, for he, too, knew that nothing could soften the blow that had come upon both, like the consciousness of the love that was between them.

'You are feeling weak to-day,' he said.

'Rather,' she replied.

And then, with one glance at the face she knew so well, she fixed her soft eyes, rendered larger than ever now by the increasing thinness of her face, full upon his, and said:

'There is something the matter, William?'

He hesitated a moment in replying. At all times it was impossible to him to beat about the bush. It lay in his very nature to come straight to whatever point he had to reach.

'Something has gone wrong with the men?' she said. 'There is trouble at the works?'

'No,' he said; 'at least, not here.'

'But in America. You have had bad news? You have heard?'

'That we have lost everything, Maggie.'

For one moment she did not speak, and he was frightened to see how much paler her pale face grew.

Then, a faint flush rising into her cheeks, she laid her hand on his, and said:

'Oh, William, how can you say so? *Everything!* When we have each other, and Margery, and, first of all and most of all, our God!'

He bent his face—working now with a yet stronger

emotion — over the thin white hand he held in his, and kissed it, and his wife felt the tears stealing over it.

She put her other hand gently round his neck, and for several minutes there was silence ; then she said :

'Tell me all about it. It is Mr. Denman's fault, I am sure. You are free from blame.'

'No,' he said ; 'I left things too much in his hands. I should have looked more into them myself ; but I trusted entirely to him, and he has speculated wildly, wickedly. And now we cannot meet our liabilities, and all must go.'

'And he is——?'

'Gone, no one knows where. But everything is quite clear, Maggie, however gloomy. There is no doubt about it —my whole fortune is gone. And I doubt whether it will suffice to pay our debts. If I felt sure that everyone to whom I owe money would receive twenty shillings in the pound I should be a happier man than I am.'

'But my fortune is safe,' his wife answered. 'My father would not allow it to go into the business. I have often heard him say that nothing could touch it.'

'No,' said Mr. Abbott ; 'it is secured to you and Margery. It is not large, but it will help to keep you in some degree of comfort. It is solely and entirely your own.'

'Is it?' she said. 'That has not been my idea of married life. I thought that everything that I possessed belonged to you ; that I had nothing of my own ; that I never have had since the day when I became your wife. Does not God Himself teach us that it can never be lawful in any way, or in anything, to put asunder those whom He has made one? And is not His will above all others, even above the will of an earthly father? My fortune may not be large, but neither is it very small. I am sure it will be a great help in paying our debts.'

A smile passed over his sad face as he said :

'The principal of your fortune, Maggie, is vested in

trustees. It could not be touched, even if I wished to do so. And if you devoted the income to the payment of our debts, we should be penniless, and what would you do?'

'I would do in poverty, William, what I have done in riches—what you have been setting me the example of doing all these years, ever since that accident made a helpless invalid of your once healthy little wife. I would hold to my husband, and seek to be a helpmeet to him, and teach our child to be the active, careful worker I can never be myself.'

The door opened at that moment, and Margery came in. Her father was on the point of sending her away, when her mother called her to her.

'I want you to tell me something, Margery—to tell me and father. What have you done with that beautiful cake that Mrs. Eglinton made for Godfrey?'

'Oh, mother, you know. We have put it away very carefully in Mrs. Eglinton's store cupboard until he comes home, and mine with it. I am not going to touch mine till he comes back.'

'And if, while he is away, Margery, some one should steal his, and you should find it gone, and only yours left, what would you do?'

Margery looked grave. She generally saw the drift of her mother's questionings, but this time she failed to do so. But she was not long in making up her mind.

'I should give him mine, mother.'

'Why, Margery? It would not be your fault that his was stolen.'

'No, mother; but he would be so vexed about it. And you know he left it under *my* care, and he thought he could trust me to keep it quite safe. And it was I who put it there. I think he ought to have mine—don't you, mother?'

'Yes, Margery, I do.'

And there was the sweetest smile on Mrs. Abbott's face, as she told her little girl that she must run away now, assuring her at the same time that she did not think there was the least chance of either her or Godfrey Prescott losing the beautiful frosted cakes which the good housekeeper had made for them in honour of Godfrey's birthday, and which were carefully stored away, to be reproduced at a feast the children were to have as soon as Godfrey returned from a week's sojourn by the sea.

'Was it,' Mr. Abbott asked himself, 'because she did not understand the full extent of the calamity that had befallen them, that she was bearing it so bravely—even cheerfully?'

Ruth Prescott, who, providentially, was on a visit to Little Burton Vicarage at this moment, asked herself the same question when, some hours later, she came to see her friend, dreading much what might have been the effect of such a shock on one so fragile, and found her quite composed.

'I think when God sends trials, He sends the strength to meet them,' she said; 'for I do not feel at all more ill today. And there is such a warm, happy feeling at my heart that this comes from Him, and He will bring good out of it to us all, to William and me, and Margery. Only I could wish that I were not so sickly. If I could do my own work, and make the beds and cook the dinner, I should be thankful. But that is not God's will either, Ruth, and I shall be able to do a great deal. I can teach Margery, and make her clothes and my own. And dear old Eglinton declares she will never leave us; and, between her and Margery, I am sure I can make the house comfortable for William. Smythson would like to stay with us too, but of course that is impossible. We shall only be able to keep one servant; for, even if William gets some good employment—which he is pretty sure to do with his high character and all his e[illegible]

ence—I know he wishes to keep our expenses down to the lowest possible point, in order to be able to pay everybody everything.'

And then, her mind turning from her own share in this trouble, and from the thought of all she was going to do to make it lighter to her husband, to that same husband who had gone off to London looking years older than he had done the day before—the tears which she felt no inclination to shed on her own account flowed fast for him.

'So good as he has always been,' she said; 'so upright and honourable; so kind and considerate to every living soul; such an example of godly love and honesty: it seems strange that he should have had so much trial—my long illness and all this loss.'

'"Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth,"' said Ruth; 'and "the purest gold needs the most refining."'

'And everything precious has to be put to the proof,' replied Mrs. Abbott—'made to go through the fire in order to see of what kind it is, and what is its power of continuance. Thank God I do not think that any furnace, however fiery it may be, can be so fiercely heated that the love which William and I have for each other shall not be able to abide it.'

And Ruth quite believed her, for in her heart she felt that it would be just the same with the love which she and her husband bore to each other.

Come what might, nothing could shake the foundation on which that sacred love was built. United together, according to God's sacred ordinance, 'in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost,' in that holy state of matrimony which God has Himself so honoured as to make it a sign and representation of the spiritual marriage and unity between Himself and His Church, nothing could ever serve to divide them, but everything—poverty, wealth, sick-

ness, health, or any other chance or change to which we are in this life subject—must, through God's gracious influence, and by the sanctifying power of His Holy Spirit, serve to draw them closer and closer in Him to each other.

CHAPTER XLII.

HOLY MATRIMONY.

The landlord of the hotel at Rugby, acting upon orders from Dr. Gaskin, came out himself to receive the lady who drove up in a cab from the station, and, handing her a note from the doctor, begged her, with a solicitude which seemed to be more for her own sake than for his, to partake of the refreshment which was waiting for her.

'The doctor hoped you would take some food, madam,' he said. 'He begged me particularly to have everything ready; he said you would have had such a long journey. He wished very much to have been here to meet you, but he had a very particular engagement, which it was impossible for him to put off.'

Helen Moorhouse scarcely heard what he said, though she declined quite graciously the offered refreshment.

It was true that she had had a long journey, and that she had left home without taking any food on the receipt of the telegram which summoned her to what she felt in her very soul was her only son's deathbed.

'Malignant scarlet fever; and no time to be lost!'

Five minutes after that telegram arrived the next train would start. In those five minutes Helen had reached Amersham station—often as she had declared that it was impossible to get there under a quarter of an hour.

'It is worse for you than for me,' she said to her husband

as he stood on the step of the railway-carriage waiting for the train to start, and wondering at what appeared a very unusual delay. And she grasped his hand with an intensity of love and sympathy such as she had never realized in all their happy married life, during which the better had always seemed on the increase, and they had known nothing of the worse, so rich had the years been in health and love, so far removed from poverty, sickness, or death. 'It is far worse for you than for me.'

'Yes,' he said, 'to know the worst is less torturing than to be constantly imagining it.'

'If we could only have been together!' she said.

'Which is impossible,' he replied, 'with Winnie so ill, and a man like Lockwood dying. I am sure he would not allow anyone else to visit him, and his soul might be on my mind for ever.'

'Yes,' she answered; 'it all seems so unfortunate. I feel very anxious about Winnie. Doctor Bevan ordered me to keep her perfectly quiet, and she must know that I should not leave her unless Harold were very ill. I dread the effect of this anxiety, for her very existence is bound up in his.'

'I will take good care of her,' said Mr. Moorhouse; 'and I feel sure your mother will be here to-morrow. You can trust her to me, Helen.'

'Indeed I can,' she answered. 'What could I not trust to you?'

And as the train at last moved off, she kissed her hand to her husband and sank back in the carriage which he had secured that she should have to herself, with the thought of him, his grief, his courage, his faith uppermost in her mind, —almost at the moment shutting out the thought of her boy.

Through long years of prosperity she had known the help and comfort which their affection had been each to the other. But never had she so felt its power as during the

few last moments, when it was being tested in the furnace of adversity. Ever since that happy day when they had given each to the other their consent in holy wedlock, witnessing the same before God and a vast company in the Church of St. Simon and St. Jude, no man and wife could have lived in a more constant fulfilment of the troth which they had thus given and pledged.

Even as Isaac and Rebecca, they had lived in perfect love together, faithfully and surely performing and keeping the vow and covenant made between them, and on no two people could the blessing pronounced upon their marriage have been more literally fulfilled. 'God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost' had indeed blessed, preserved, and kept them, looking mercifully upon them, and, from the first days of their union, so filling them with spiritual benediction and grace that Mr. Heathcote had sometimes said they appeared to him as a living illustration of both the psalms appointed to be read in the Marriage Service. Often, as he read them, had his thoughts turned to Amersham Vicarage, with its pleasant labours, and the blessing that God had bestowed so richly on a home where husband and wife alike continually strove so to live together in this life that in the world to come they might have life everlasting.

Ruth's married life, if equally happy, had been less smoothly so, and she had known in it the discipline which its cares and contrarieties would necessarily bring to so impulsive and excitable a nature, but Helen's peace had flowed like a river from the first day she entered her married home until now. And, indeed, it was flowing now. Beneath all the beatings of her so suddenly disturbed heart, she could hear a voice bidding her be still, and she knew it was the voice of her Saviour. And oh! how thankful she was to be alone with Him, as she joined her hands together, and cried—it seemed as if she must utter the words aloud in

order herself to hear them above, the fears and doubts that were clamouring within her soul:

'O Lord, save Thy servant—save Thy handmaid. We *do* put our trust in Thee. O Lord, send us help from Thy holy place!'

Almost did it seem that she could hear her Saviour's voice in answer, promising that He would defend them, that He would be to them a tower of strength from the face of their enemy. Let that enemy be who or what it might—doubt, or fear, or death—she felt in her soul that the Lord had heard her prayer, and her cry had come unto Him.

So that when the carriage stopped at the hotel, and the landlord came out to meet her, he was surprised to see so much composure in a lady who was in such deep trial; for Dr. Gaskin had told him that it was scarcely possible that the only son, to whose death-bed she was travelling, could live to feel his mother's kiss upon his brow.

'To the school,' he said, as he placed her in the carriage himself; 'and drive as fast as you can.'

But though the man obeyed his orders to the letter, and Helen knew that he was doing so by the speed with which the horses flew over the ground, the time that drive took, after having received the doctor's note, would have been maddening to anyone whose strength of mind and body had *not* been upheld, as hers were, by a will made obedient to God's, and by the consciousness which such submission brings of being in safety under His protection, and abiding in His love.

At length her straining eyes caught sight, through the dim light of the almost closed-in evening, of the tall trees, which she recognised as those which shaded the large school-field. How well she remembered her first sight of that field, shining then in the pleasant light of an afternoon sun; and how her boy had fixed an eager, happy look on the game of cricket which was going on in it at that moment—a look his

father had delighted to see, for it told him that, fond as his son was of study, his anticipations were not all of books and prizes. The scene now, as they drove nearer and passed close along the empty field, surrounded by the dark trees, fitted in well with her feelings. 'The landscape was there, but the sunshine was gone.'

And so also with the school-house. Then, although so gray and heavy in architecture, it was made bright by the sunshine; now it was glooming darkly down upon her, as the fly drove up to the door, and the porter answered the peal of the big bell.

That kind, good head-master, whom her boy's weekly letters had taught her to love almost as much as long knowledge of his character and life had led her to honour, came himself to meet her.

Her personal acquaintance with him had been only of a few days' experience, but that brief time had been sufficient to make a powerful impression on her mind.

'And yet he is not a bit like you,' she had said to her husband, when, not six months before, they had driven away from the school, happy and thankful to have left their boy under the charge of a man who possessed such an extraordinary influence for good over all—an influence felt by every master and every boy in that large school, even by those who hardened their hearts against it, and did not join the great army in which he was so noble a leader, or carry on with him the conflict which he waged so valiantly against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

'He *is* good, and clever, and noble; but he is not like you, as I fancied he would be,' she had said.

And when her husband laughingly asked her why she had imagined that he would be so, she could find no other reason for her supposition than the strong friendship that had existed between them at Oxford, where they had been contemporaries.

'Which friendship,' he replied, 'was no doubt considerably strengthened by the dissimilarity of character, which was quite as great as our similarity of tastes and principles. He was made to lead, and I to follow. He would have been as lost in private life as I should have been a failure in public life. God has given each of us the work that we are fitted for. I only wish I could fulfil mine as well as he is fulfilling his, and I thank God with you that our boy is one of those who is allowed the privilege of coming under his personal influence.'

This thankfulness had grown and strengthened with every letter they had received from Harold. How many times Helen had carried those letters away with her into the secrecy of her own room, and kneeling there before her God, had thanked Him for them, and prayed for grace to be always thankful, *only* thankful, never proud, never elated, was known only to God and to herself.

For all had gone well with Harold Moorhouse from the very first day that he had passed within those school-gates, and become, what he had so often longed to be, a public-school boy. Singularly well grounded by his scholarly father, his proficiency had surprised the master, in whose form he had been placed, and he was constantly being told that he would be promoted next half. Work was neither new nor painful to him, so he got on well with his master; whilst play—that hearty, exhilarating out-door play with companions of his own age, which is such a joy to every healthy, manly boy—was as pleasant to him as it was new. Poor little Winifred, who had so longed that he might be happy, and so feared lest he should be home-sick or overworked, still felt her heart sometimes sink when she heard the letters read, which told in such enthusiastic terms of his great happiness at school, where he enjoyed everything, and missed nothing.

And, in the midst of all this, just, too, when Winifred,

and indeed older people than Winifred, were beginning to count the days when these successes and these delights would be told over and over again to them, not with pen and ink, but with eager intonation of the voice they loved so well, and animated sparkling of the eyes into which they longed again to look—in the midst of all this hope and happiness and thankfulness came the telegram which told of the precious life hovering on the very verge of the grave.

CHAPTER XLIII.

HOLY MATRIMONY.

The headmaster's voice had been one of the things which had made most impression on Helen Moorhouse during those few days of intercourse with him. It so exactly fitted in with the idea which her knowledge of his writings had led her to form of him; there was such singular strength and life in it, inspiring those who heard it with the consciousness of his intensity of purpose and force of will; and yet, joined with these, there was an equally striking tenderness of tone, telling of the fullest sympathy with every infirmity that frail flesh could feel, and the truest compassion for every temptation that weak mortality could be called to undergo. Often during the last few months, especially when Harold, knowing well what best would please his mother, had quoted in his Sunday letter some few words which the doctor had uttered that afternoon from the oak pulpit in the school chapel—often had the tones of that voice returned to Helen's mind, but never, perhaps, had anyone heard such tones of sympathy from him, as when he told her himself that 'her boy still lived, and they were thankful she was not too late.'

He gave no hope, for there was none to give, but he took her to the door of the passage leading to the sick-room where her boy lay, and there one of the two nurses in attendance met her—a woman whose calmness of manner and voice inspired her at once with a sense of trust. She had

intended to prepare Helen for the sight that awaited her within, but she was accustomed to read people's feelings in their faces, and long and varied experience had made her a quick discerner of character, and the first glance at that poor mother told her that she was well prepared already, or that even if she had not been, her nerve would not have failed her. So she only said:

'I am afraid he will not know you.'

But in this she was mistaken. Although her darling spoke no word, the look he fixed upon his mother as she put her arms round him and pressed him to her bosom was quite recognition enough to satisfy Helen's heart. To no one but her whom he knew to be his mother would such a look have been given. This she felt, though even from her was hidden the yet happier consciousness that the long tender kiss she pressed upon his burning brow, conveyed to his very soul, almost unconsciously and yet with exceeding comfort, a sense not of her love and presence only, but of God's also.

All through that long night Helen watched beside her boy, and for several days and nights afterwards, rarely taking even an hour's sleep, and when she did close her eyes, finding less rest than when she watched beside him. His sufferings were very great, and her one prayer almost became that God would see fit in His mercy to relieve them and take her treasure to Himself. But through all his agony of body, and through all her agony of mind, her faith never failed her, and her thanksgivings went up to God that His faith never failed him. Not one word of murmuring escaped him, even when the pain was at the worst, and though it suffered him to speak but little, the few words he uttered were all such as she could remember afterwards with love and gratitude.

Once he asked earnestly to be 'lifted up;' and when his mother complied with this request, and raised him in her

arms from the pillow where he had been lying in extreme pain, he joined his hands together in an attitude of prayer.

'Our Father,' he murmured. 'I'm very tired. Our Father——'

Only these words passed his dear lips, but were they not enough to carry comfort and hope to that praying mother? In that supreme moment her boy's thoughts were fixed there, where she had so prayed they might be—on the love of that heavenly Father Whom he had been taught to trust and cling to as *his* Father from his babyhood, Whom he had never forsaken, and Who would never forsake him; Who knew that His child was indeed very tired—for if the journey had not been long, it had been a very hard one at the last—and was preparing a resting-place for him.

Then again, just ten hours before he entered into that rest, came once more the same cry, 'Lift me up!' And again his mother raised his dear head, and watched his dear face with stilled breath, as he folded his hands and, with quivering lips and struggling breath, repeated his old baby hymn, unsaid for years, but evidently deeply rooted in his heart:

'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child;
Pity my simplicity,
Suffer me to come to Thee.

'Fain would I to Thee be brought—
Dearest Lord, forbid it not—
In the kingdom of Thy grace,
Give Thy little child a place.'

Those were his last words. Gifted as he had been all through the progressing years of his short life, advanced in learning far beyond his age, well acquainted with much beautiful poetry of deep religious character, and able to delight others by the feeling and appreciation with which he often repeated whole pages of it, in that last moment his baby-hymn was the one to return upon his heart, and supply words for his last prayer to his heavenly Father. And

how blessedly that prayer was answered it needed but to look upon his sweet face when the struggle was past, and the rest was entered into, fully to realize.

As he lay in his last sweet sleep, a few hours afterwards, with the flowers on his breast and in his hands, every shade of pain had faded from his face, and it wore a smile such as none who saw it could ever forget. It embodied for his mother the words, 'The peace of God that passeth all understanding.' Ever afterwards, when those words fell upon her ear in church or elsewhere, she seemed again to see, quite as vividly as when first she saw it, the sweet, peaceful face of her first-born son, the object of her dearest hopes and prayers, to whom God had given more than, in that last dying prayer, he had desired. He had asked for a place in the kingdom of God's grace, and He had given him a place in the kingdom of His glory. He had prayed to be 'lifted up,' and his heavenly Father had placed His everlasting arms beneath him, and had Himself lifted him up—far, far above all the trials and temptations of this life, into His own presence.

When Helen Moorhouse came out from that room, it was very difficult to realize that she had been so short a time in it, so great was the change in her appearance wrought by that time of heart-agony and soul-discipline. And yet her husband envied her, and she could well understand his doing so. As they stood together beside their darling's grave, she uttered her deep thankfulness for the mercy that had enabled her, without failing in strength of body or mind, to watch with her boy, and nurse, support and comfort him to the last, and her deep sympathy for her husband, whom duty, the highest of all duty, the care of the souls entrusted to him, had deprived of this privilege.

It had indeed been a hard trial of faith; but his had been equal to the test, and had come out strengthened and purified.

'God knows best,' he said. 'God knows best always and in everything. After all, we, who believe, come back to this great truth. The desire of our heart has not been given to us, for there was such singular promise in the first blossoms of our boy's opening life, that it would have been impossible not to have looked forward to his making his mark in the world, and that a mark which should cause his memory to live gratefully in the minds of men.'

'Yes,' Helen replied, 'I have often thought that, certainly as regarded our boy, we were likely to realize very fully the answer to our frequent prayer that we might be enabled to bring up our children christianly and virtuously, and see them living to God's praise and glory.'

'And are we not doing so?' he said. 'Could our darling ever have praised and glorified God on earth as he is doing in paradise? The "shadow of his early loss" rests on us, and we cannot but shiver beneath it sometimes, when the sunlight of our faith is not strong enough to dispel it, but "to the spirit-world above, earth's clouds rise not to shade his brow!" And though flesh and blood must suffer, and are not forbidden to suffer, on the contrary, our Lord sympathizes in the sorrow, and sustains our souls in it; though we grieve for our loss, and shall always miss the sweetness of his love, yet we *do* also rejoice in his happiness.'

'And do not feel him lost,' said Helen. 'I never like to hear that word, though it is of course true in many ways. But I never let myself—I dare not let myself dwell on this. He is not lost to us, even in this life. I know he is not! No one could feel as I do about him, unless his presence were really still with me; unless he were still thinking of me, and looking forward, even as I am, to the time when we shall be together again—my conflict over also, my crown gained too. *That* thought, more than any other, often makes me dry my tears when they are falling fastest, and strengthens me to set

myself with fresh courage to do the work which God gives me yet to do for Him.'

That evening, Mr. Moorhouse, returning again from the school-chapel—this time in company with the headmaster, and for the purpose of consulting together concerning a fit memorial to Harold—found Helen alone in her room, a paper in her hand, and the traces of very recent tears upon her cheeks.

'See,' she said, 'what Ruthie has sent me. Is it not a lovely expression of what we were saying this afternoon? Read it—aloud if you can.'

And taking the paper, he read these lines:

'ADSUM.

'Forth from the ranks he stood
To answer to his name—
Obedient to his Master's voice,
Fearless and frank he came;
Our lad with sweet, bright eyes,
Whose name we used to say,
As common household names are said
A hundred times a day.
So, in this school of ours,
This busy, restless life,
Love pictures out some future fame
Amidst some future strife.
But Love, surpassing ours,
Saw more than we could see:
Saw higher lessons to be learnt
Of deeper mystery.
So from the Master's voice
The grand, sweet summons came,
And forth from the ranks he stood
To answer to his name.'

CHAPTER XLIV.

HOLY MATRIMONY.

Mr. Prescott had carried Ruth's letter to the post-office himself on his way to business, that it might reach her sister by an earlier post, with the sweet lines of comfort which it contained.

Ruth, as was her custom, waited at the window until he turned the corner of the street and was out of sight, and then went to her nursery, where Godfrey, as usual, ran to meet her, and, forcing her down into the low nursing chair, sprang upon her lap, to 'love her' as he called it, and almost squeezing the breath from her with the force of his embraces, asked 'why she wore that ugly black dress. He wanted her to take it off, and put on her pretty white one.'

She told him that it was because his cousin Harold, the 'big boy' whom he so admired and loved, and who was so good to him, was gone away from this world, and they were all so sorry that they should never see him again, that they had put on black clothes.

But Godfrey was by no means satisfied. To his mind, this was very poor reasoning. Mother had told him last night that Harold was gone to be with Jesus, and never be sick or naughty, as boys were here, so he thought no one ought to be sorry; and it was silly to wear a black dress.

And he could not understand why Ruth was crying now, as she listened to his innocent talk, or why Esther answered

'Yes, indeed,' with tears in her own eyes, when his mother asked her 'If it was not very sad?'

But, sad as it was, there was no bitterness in the sadness, for there was no sin, and truly the sting of sorrow, as of death, is sin.

It was trouble of a very different character from that which at this very moment, unknown to them, had come upon Minnie Dent, in her pretty home, only two streets off.

She, too, had grieved truly for Harold's death Though 'Miss Ruthie' had always been so much dearer to her, 'Miss Helen' had also been very dear, and for days she had been watching so eagerly for the little notes that Ruth never failed to send her as soon as the post was in, that in her interest and sympathy she had felt less painfully than usual what was the great trouble of her life, her husband's long and frequent absence.

On this particular morning, however, she was feeling the weight of this trial more heavily than almost ever before.

There were no more notes coming from Ruth. All anxiety for Harold was at an end. Ruth was engrossed in her sister's sorrow, and occupied in the various arrangements which it involved. And Minnie felt more lonely and miserable than ever.

So miserable did she feel on this dull morning, when even the leaden sky seemed doing its best to make everything look dark and hopeless, that when the postman passed her door without stopping at it—as she felt sure he would do, although she had been watching for him ever since breakfast—she turned from the window too utterly wretched to care what she did.

Scarcely had she left the window, when there was a ring at the door, and a minute afterwards the maid informed her that 'two men were waiting to speak to her in the dining-room.'

Something in the girl's voice and look awoke a sudden

terror in Minnie's heart, which a few minutes before she had imagined to be dead to everything—hope, or fear, or love. Asking no question, however, she went down at once into the room where the two men were waiting to receive her—one an old man, the other young, both strangers to her, and neither of them at all pleasing looking. Rough men they were, and coarse, and too much hardened by the constant sight of trouble to be much affected by it. But as Minnie came into the room, her tall figure erect, her little head carried high, as though to question their right to be there (for she thought they were duns, who had taken advantage of Alfred's being away to try and get money out of her), the colour heightened in her cheeks, and her beautiful eyes dilated with a mingled feeling of shame and anger, both men were struck with her exceeding beauty, and an expression of pity, to which it was but little accustomed, passed over the elder man's face. He had a young married daughter about Minnie's age. She was thought very pretty, but she was not beautiful like this young woman. She had a very comfortable home, but not one replete with luxuries and elegancies as this was. How could he have borne to see anyone enter it to do the work which he had come to do here? For the first time in his life he left his companion—a young fellow who he often declared 'always wanted to push himself forward,' and needed to be repressed, and who at this moment was staring at Minnie with all his might—to take the initiative. He asked her where her husband was, and she said she did not know. He told her plainly that he did not believe her, and would have been ready to question and cross-question her—thinking meanwhile that this was the first time that his business had led him into dealings with such a beautiful young creature as this—had she been willing to answer his questions. But she was not. 'Her husband was away on business connected with the firm in which he was engaged. He did not always know himself

where he could be found. He would be at home shortly. They might leave their address, and he would no doubt communicate with them.'

She was so haughty, and, at the same time, so self-possessed, that the elder man, though he cut short his companion's questionings, and took the matter into his own hands, did not fear to tell her the facts of the case.

Her husband had left the business in which he was engaged weeks before. The evenings which she had imagined him to have been spending at the office, working over hours, had been passed in gambling. The bills of which she knew, and which this extra work would easily enable him to pay—especially when it had led to the promised promotion—were all unpaid, but were as nothing compared to the debts of which she had never heard, and which had at last brought these two men to her house to take possession of everything in it.

She listened to the end, with eyes more and more widely dilated, and then every shade of the heightened colour faded from her face. The old man had reckoned too much on this proud young woman's strength of character. As he finished speaking, her hold loosened on the table by which she stood, not choosing to sit down, and she would have fallen to the ground had he not caught her and laid her fainting on the sofa. He rang the bell until the rope gave way, and called for help, but no one came, and the younger man was just going out to seek assistance when Ruth entered with the agitated maid-servant.

The girl knew the men well enough, and when her mistress, without even inquiring who they were, went down to speak to them, she had not scrupled to follow, and—her ideas of honour being of the lowest—to listen at the door. Then, hearing enough to tell her, from past experience, what would follow, she became frightened. It would kill her mistress to know that the bailiffs were in her house, and

if the girl's principles were not of the highest, her heart was of the warmest, and she had the greatest love for her young mistress, and much sympathy for her in her present circumstances, of which, indeed, she knew far more than Minnie herself.

'It has come at last,' she thought when she admitted the men into the house, and after ascertaining that she was not mistaken in the nature of their errand by this short application of her ear to the door, she threw on her hat and went off to Mrs. Prescott's.

And thus it came to pass that when Minnie opened her eyes after the long dead faint into which she had fallen, they rested only on two kindly faces, that of her best earthly friend, which was almost as pale as her own, and the other the rosy face of Jane, the maid, redder than ever from excitement and fear.

The bailiffs had withdrawn, at Mrs. Prescott's entreaty, to the drawing-room, where they were conversing together in tones of pity most unusual to them.

'I hope to goodness it has not killed her,' said the younger. 'One does not see such a handsome girl as that often in the world, and it would be a pity to have her sent out of it by the conduct of such a scamp as Alfred Dent.'

The elder man meanwhile had taken up the dainty bit of work which was lying on Minnie's basket, and was holding it in an awkward way between his not over-clean fingers.

He had seen his daughter working sometimes at such pretty looking little garments, but had never touched one before.

He laid it down again with a look of real compassion, and had just made the remark that 'this was about the most unpleasant job he had ever had to do in all his life, though he had done many nasty ones before,' when Mrs. Prescott came into the room, looking, the younger man thought, nearly as pretty as Mrs. Dent, though in a different style.

Her fair face was flushed with nervousness, and her voice shook as she proffered her request that 'they would leave now and come again another day; Mrs. Dent seemed so very ill.'

This was impossible, they replied, but they consented at once to the next entreaty, which was that she might send for a cab and take Minnie away to her own house.

'And let her take anything she likes with her,' said the old man—'anything, I mean, of her personal comforts—anything she is likely to want. We will stay here and do our duty—I'm bothered if I ever found it so hard to do before.'

And his look and voice were so full of real kindness that Ruth could have found it in her heart to shake hands with him, in spite of the hands not being of the cleanest.

A few hours later, and Ruth sat on a low chair in front of the fire in her 'spare room' with a tiny baby on her lap, dividing her attention between it and the wan, white young mother who lay in the bed. So wan and white she looked that it was a relief to Ruth's mind when the nurse, who had only been absent from the room for a few minutes, returned to it, and, taking the baby from her arms, allowed her to resume her place beside the bed.

Later on in the night the doctor came again, and Ruth left her anxious watch once more, this time to follow him down the stairs with the often-asked question, often so impossible to answer, 'Is there any hope?'

'It was impossible to tell; it depended on the rallying power; he did not know himself how far his patient was conscious.'

'I believe she is fully conscious,' was Ruth's reply, uttered so decidedly as to surprise the doctor, who knew her to be so timid and self-distrustful, so slow to put forward her own opinions, and so ready to lean on those of others.

But Ruth was not mistaken. Knowing Minnie as well as

she did, she could interpret aright the expression in the large eyes, which every now and then were opened wide —only for an instant certainly, yet long enough to give Ruth time to observe both the anxious, miserable look in them when first they opened, and the expression of utter, hopeless weariness with which they closed again. She read their meaning truly, and she understood also the quick, impatient movements which at times disturbed the heavy calm, almost amounting to stupor, in which she generally lay.

So that, notwithstanding the necessity of perfect quiet, as she sat beside Minnie's bed all through that long first night of her little baby's life, she repeated from time to time, in gentlest voice, some few words from the Bible, all words of comfort and of healing.

'Poor thing!' the nurse had said that evening when summoned to what it seemed probable would be Minnie's death bed; 'poor young, misguided thing! What had she to do with taking up with such an unprincipled, godless fellow as that Dent? Whatever possessed her to do it?'

Yes; that was the question Minnie's conscience kept asking her—asking her with the cruel tormenting relentlessness which conscience loves to use when, circumstances having laid low its victim, it has at last the power to assume the upper hand, and, as a tyrant now where once it had been a friend, to scourge and chastise those who had neglected its previous upbraidings and forewarnings.

Ruth knew that it was so, and far was it from her loving, tender soul to add to the grief of any whom the Lord had wounded. Minnie's grief was her grief. The day of her distress was a day of distress to her also. And as she looked on her calamity, her sore affliction filled her heart with heaviness.

She knew how deep the wound must be, and from time to time she uttered gently such words as came into her soul.

'When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I.'

'Thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious.'

'Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.'

'Have mercy upon me, O Lord, for I am weak. O Lord, heal me, for my bones are vexed.'

'Come unto Me, all ye that are weary, and heavy laden and I will give you rest.'

CHAPTER XLV.

THANKSGIVING AFTER CHILDBIRTH, OR CHURCHING.

'THERE never was anything so sad in all the world, I believe.'

And Ruth Prescott's voice was most pitiful in its tone, and large tears fell from her eyes and stained the white ribbons of the innocent little baby who was the subject of her sorrow.

'I am afraid there are many more sad things in this sad life than you have any idea of, Ruthie,' replied her husband, as he sat down beside her, fixing a very sorrowful gaze himself on the infant that Ruth was gently rocking to and fro in her arms, and that was softly wailing as though already conscious of the hard fate that deprived it of its natural resting-place in the arms of its mother.

'Poor little innocent,' Ruth continued, 'and she has never seen it, or at least never consented to look at it.'

'And never mentions it?'

'Never, except on those two occasions when I told her that you insisted on its being baptized, and asked her what it should be called, and she said, "Anything you like, only not Minnie." She repeated it twice, emphatically, "Not Minnie;" I shall never forget the tone.'

'There was feeling in it, at all events,' said Mr. Prescott. 'And there was feeling too in what you tell me, about her being glad it was a girl.'

'Yes,' said Ruth, 'she did say, when I told her she had a little girl, "Thank God!" in a tone of relief. And that is the only time that the name of God has passed her lips since she has been ill.'

'Though you read and pray with her every day! And she is willing for you to do so?'

'She allows it, Leonard; but it has been a very passive sort of consent. I doubt my being able to continue it much longer as she regains her strength.'

'Dr. Langworthy says she has more strength than you imagine, and that she must be roused,' said Mr. Prescott.

'Yes; he has told me to get her up to-morrow before he comes. He says she ought to be out of doors by this time, and asked me if she did not think of being churched.'

'And you told him?'

'I did not know what to say. I don't think, Leonard, she will ever consent to be churched. She will not allow the least approach to the subject, and it would be inexpressibly painful. Indeed, I don't see myself how she could take her proper part in the service. It would be a mockery. I have gone over the service many times lately, with her in my thoughts, and every time I seem less able to urge her. She is certainly not prepared to give God hearty thanks for preserving her in the great danger of childbirth.'

'And yet,' said Mr. Prescott, 'no one has more reason to do so, if she only saw things in their true light. Only think how awful it would have been if it had *not* pleased Almighty God of His goodness to give her safe deliverance. She was very near death. It would have been most terrible if she had died with her heart as full as it is now of bitterness against her husband, turning, in her hatred of him, even against his child.'

'My father says it is the very saddest case that he has ever seen in all his experience,' continued Ruth. 'He tried to get her to listen to the first of those very Psalms in the

Churching Service, but without any success, although the first part of David's experience has certainly been hers, and is still; 'for if ever any poor creature found trouble and heaviness, she has. Those who were with her during that terrible night can truly say, not only that the snares of death compassed her round about, but that the pains of hell had hold of her. And yet she would not call on the name of the Lord.'

'But you called upon Him for her, Ruthie?'

'Indeed I did, Leonard; I was so miserable. I felt so helpless. The cry came from my very heart.'

'And God inclined His ear unto it, Ruthie. You must not doubt it. The answer has not come yet, but it will come. The Lord has heard the voice of your prayer in delivering that poor child's soul from death. We must trust to Him to hear it yet, in giving her faith to believe in Him, and in His love.'

'Which is just what she doubts. Her husband's conduct seems to have shaken her faith in man and God. I don't know that she believes in *us*, Leonard.'

'She is sore troubled, poor child,' replied Mr. Prescott. 'And because her husband has deceived her so cruelly, she says in her haste that all men are liars. But God can bring her to a better mind. He is gracious as well as righteous, and very merciful. We may yet see Minnie walking before Him in the land of the living, thanking Him for all the benefits that He has done unto her, most especially for the benefit of this great affliction. Do not despair, Ruth. She may yet come again with you into the courts of the Lord's House, to receive the cup of salvation, and pay her vows in the presence of His people.'

'Your faith puts mine to shame,' said Ruth.

'It is not as clouded by personal sorrow, Ruthie. This is a great grief to you.'

All the greater because I cannot but feel I have helped

to bring it on myself, and on her. Oh, Leonard, if I had only listened to mother! If I had only dissuaded her from coming to live with us, instead of encouraging her! Then she might never have renewed acquaintance with young Dent, and she would have remained under mother's influence, which would have been so much better than mine. I think I have been always too fond of her to have had a good influence over her.'

'An unfortunate state of things for a wife and mother, if it were true,' said Mr. Prescott, smiling; 'but it is not true, as I can testify.'

But Ruth did not smile.

'I have not influenced Minnie for good, at all events,' she said, 'most of all in bringing her to live here. Oh, Leonard, if we could only undo the past!'

'We should lose all the lessons which it has taught us, Ruthie, and with them much of our present power of usefulness, and perhaps of our future happiness and glory. But we are forgetting the time, and that the fly will be here to take you and that poor little infant to church very soon.'

'She seems to have gone into a sound sleep. John is to meet us at the church, is he not?'

A very quiet and a very sad ceremony was that baptism, seeming to those who took part in it almost sadder from the contrast it offered to two others which took place at the same time.

The parents of one of the children were strangers to Ruth. She had never before seen either the sturdy young artisan, or the fresh, comely little woman who, radiant with pride and happiness, had come into the Temple of the Lord that—as in the days of old—their child might be presented to Him in holy dedication, and the mother might acknowledge by an act of Holy Worship to Him her recognition of His mercy in saving her in the hour of her great danger. The other parents were well-known to Ruth, as

indeed they are to us also. For the one was Andrew Lovell, and the other his gentle wife Mary.

Andrew's health had never recovered from the illness which was the result of the ill-treatment he had received at the hands of 'Burly Ben' and his companions. He came out of St. Margaret's Hospital shattered in constitution and enfeebled in every limb. His friend, John Preston, had done everything he could for him, giving him one post after another, in the hopes of finding some employment for which his failing strength would be equal. But it had always given way again, and at length he had come to live at Uxminster, where, through Mr. Prescott's influence, he had obtained a light service as timekeeper in a large establishment. But it was hard work for one so delicate to be regular in his employment, and child after child had come to eat the daily bread which it was so difficult to gain. And yet, if it was sometimes hard to provide the portion of food which each fresh claimant demanded, the provision of love was never wanting. Andrew Lovell's eyes rested on this last little one with quite as much tenderness as ever they had rested on his eldest, and when the minister gave back the wee infant into Mary's arms, the kiss which she imprinted on the little forehead, wet with the holy water, was to the full as fond as the kiss she impressed on the brow of her firstborn.

The young couple went away after the baptismal service was over; all the others had remained to receive the Holy Communion. They were the only communicants on that week-day morning, and, as they left the church, the verger, who saw them join company outside the porch, and take their way down the street, thought within himself that they were a curiously diverse group to be associated thus together in evidently close intimacy—that fine, distinguished-looking gentleman whom he knew well, walking side by side with that broken-down artisan with threadbare coat; just

behind them, young Mrs. Prescott, elegant in appearance and attire, with her pretty maid Esther on one side of her, carrying a white-robed baby, whom old Jones imagined to be Mrs. Prescott's last born, and on the other side Mary Lovell, with her little one in her arms ; whilst closely following them were John Grainger, and with him the young man who had just been standing godfather to Andrew Lovell's infant son.

But different as the various individuals who composed that little group were in outward appearance, the closest resemblance existed inwardly between them, and one spirit dwelt in all their hearts as they conversed together of the holy ceremonies in which they had taken part.

'I wonder who that nice-looking young woman was,' Ruth had said to Mary Lovell, who replied that 'she could tell her.' She had come to live near them quite lately —a good, fresh girl from the country, married to one of the steadiest workmen in the same house where Andrew was employed.

'They looked wonderfully happy,' continued Ruth. 'I wish they had remained for the Holy Communion.'

'So did I, ma'am,' said Mary. 'I had spoken a great deal to her on the subject, but I did not urge it at the last, for I did not think she seemed to understand enough about it.'

'They both seemed so nice,' said Ruth.

'And well brought up,' replied Mary ; 'but not religiously ; good, honest people, both of them, but not caring or understanding much about Church principles or Church services. The young woman took to me, and I took to her at once, and the birth of her first baby just at the same time as the birth of my last—I hope it *is* my last—has quite made friends of us.'

Ruth interrupted her, saying, with a smile : 'You hope it is the last ?'

'Well, ma'am, it seems as though it would be a mercy if

it were, though I do hold to it that the last is every bit as precious as the first.'

'And that, whatever these gentlemen may say who lecture on political economy, and look upon things in another light than that of the Bible and God's good providence, children *are* an heritage and a gift that cometh of the Lord,' replied Ruth.

'One of His most blessed gifts,' said Mary. 'We do believe that, both Andrew and I; and if they turn out well —as we have the promise that they shall do, if we only bring them up well—the day will come when they will be as great a help to us as they sometimes now are a burden, although a very precious one. My husband often says that a man's back bends sometimes, and his limbs fail under a heavy weight, even though the load is very valuable, and he would not part with any portion of it for all the world could offer him. One has to work hard to bring up a family; it can't be done without pulling here and pulling there.'

'Rising early and taking rest late, and eating the bread of carefulness,' said Ruth.

'And that is not enough, ma'am,' said Mary, who had had very real experience both of man's labour and God's blessing upon it. 'That Psalm says truly that except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it; and except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. I was glad the minister read that Psalm to-day instead of the other.'

Ruth inquired why, for 'the other' would have been more in unison with her own feelings.

'On account of Lydia Phillips and her husband. They are, as it were, *too* happy in themselves and their child and their well-doing, for me to be happy about them.'

'Yet, you see,' said Ruth, 'she acknowledges God's providence in coming to be churched. The Vicar was telling us only the other day that there are hundreds of women in

the parish who never dream of coming to offer thanksgiving to God in this appointed way, even though they have their children baptized to secure them Christian burial.'

Mary did not tell Mrs. Prescott that it was entirely owing to her influence that her young neighbour *had* come that day to be 'churched.'

CHAPTER XLVI.

THANKSGIVING AFTER CHILDBIRTH, OR CHURCHING.

This fact, however, Andrew Lovell was at that moment making clear to Mr. Prescott, who had expressed to him the satisfaction which the sight of the young artisan and his wife had afforded him.

'It's all along of my Mary, sir,' he said. 'She has taken a world of trouble with that young woman to make her understand that it was the right thing to do. As it certainly is, sir; though here was a time when I knew as little about it as anyone on earth. I was always thankful to see my wife safe, and glad to have another little one.'

'But you did not look on it from a religious point of view as you do now.'

'That's just it, sir. I felt for my missus in her trouble and pain, but I did not recognise them to be a result of the sin by which the mother of us all brought a sinful race into a world of sorrow.'

'And though you rejoiced over your children, you did not recognise them to be a gift of God?'

'No, sir, I did not, nor did Mary; not when our first little ones were born. She often says that Eve had a more religious feeling about it than she had, though she was, as it were, fresh from sinning against God. For she did say, "I have gotten a man *from the Lord*."'

'So that you see, Andrew, this custom goes further back for its origin even than the Jewish Rite of Purification, and is based on the very first principles of religion. We see this plainly in those two verses—God says to the woman, "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children," thus leaving a perpetual memorial of the punishment for sin; and the woman declares her first child to be sent by God, thus acknowledging His Providence.'

'That's true, sir. I must tell my Mary of that. For she was making young Mrs. Phillips see how old a custom this rendering of thanks to God was, by showing her how every Jewish woman was obliged by God's Law to come into the Temple after the birth of her child and give thanks and offerings to the Lord, according to her means. She read her that chapter in Leviticus, and she showed her how the Lord's own Mother, the Blessed Virgin Mother, had hallowed the service by coming up to Jerusalem at the appointed time to present her Holy Child to the Lord, and offer her sacrifices according to the Law.'

'It seems to me, Andrew, that young Mrs. Phillips has found a very true friend in your good wife.'

'Indeed she has, sir. My Mary is like a mother to her. And I have it in my heart to believe that she will be her spiritual mother also. You should see how attentively that young woman listens to all she says to her. I believe she would have stayed for the Holy Communion along with us, if Mary had pressed it a little more.'

'But she did not?'

'No, sir. You see, it is not the sort of service that one would like anyone to take part in to please any other person.'

'Indeed it is not, Andrew; though to those who enter into its true meaning and its efficacy, it seems an almost necessary completion of such services as those in which we have just taken part—the presenting of our children to God,

and the offering of our thanksgivings to Him for the preservation of the lives of their dear mothers.'

'It does, sir; it truly does,' replied Andrew earnestly. 'It strengthens all our prayers.'

'Yes,' said Mr. Prescott, 'it does, securing their acceptance with God, through the merits of His dear Son.'

Parting from their humble friends at their own door as cordially as if they had all been of the same rank, which indeed, during the circumstances of the morning, they had felt themselves to be, Mr. and Mrs. Prescott entered their house to find Minnie apparently just as they had left her, lying with her face turned to the wall, regardless of every comfort provided for her.

'Let me alone,' she had said continually, often very impatiently. 'I don't want to live; I want to die.'

And yet, surely, they said to each other, Minnie well knew what death must be to those from whom its sting is not removed by faith in Him Who has conquered it, and opened to believers the gates of everlasting life.

Ruth herself had robed the little babe for its baptism, sitting within sight of the unhappy mother; but though she had looked constantly towards the bed, she had not once met Minnie's eyes.

'Surely her mind must have gone wrong,' she thought; and yet the doctor did not think so, nor was there any other sign of insanity about her than this persistent refusal to see her child, or to take any trouble whatever to secure the recovery of her own health, about which they were so nxious.

Ruth pleaded with her, using every argument that her thought and love could suggest; but Minnie's ears were deaf now to the sweet tones of the voice which once had possessed such a powerful influence over her.

She brought the baby to her in its baptismal robes, and begged her to look at it for her sake.

'I am to be its godmother,' she said, in a tone which brought tears into the old nurse's eyes. 'And it is to be called "Ruth" after me, and "Mary" after your mother. Only think how she would have loved it, Minnie. Will you not look at it for her sake? You loved your mother dearly, and you used to love me too, when you were my pet little pupil. For your mother's sake, and for mine, will you not give one look at your poor little baby?'

And Minnie did fix her eyes on it for an instant—only an instant—and then, with a short, sharp cry, as of acute pain, she turned away her head, and hid her face in the pillow.

Looking down on the poor little baby's face, Ruth felt what had caused that sudden cry, for she saw in it that strong resemblance to its father that one often remarks between a very young infant and one or other of its parents.

'I fear that the bitterness of her grief has turned her love for her husband into positive hatred,' she said to Mr. Prescott.

And on their return from church she made no fresh attempt to persuade Minnie to look upon the child.

The little one was taken to Ruth's nursery and cherished there by Esther, almost, if not quite, as tenderly as though it had been another child of the house to which she was so much attached.

For its sake she even delayed her marriage with John Grainger, which, but for this interruption, was to have taken place that very month.

And John, through all his disappointment, smiled upon her, when she told him what she thought it was her duty to do, and said that she was right to do it.

'You see,' she said to him, as they sat together in the day-nursery, where he often now spent his evening hours, Esther sewing diligently, and the worse than orphaned baby sleep-

ing in its cradle beside her, 'it seems as if only I could enter into the strange circumstances of the case. We could scarcely expect any girl who might be engaged to take care of this child to be as devoted to it as if it were Mrs. Prescott's, especially with the mother living here, seeming able to do all she ought for it herself, and yet refusing to do anything at all.'

'Does Mrs. Prescott mean to adopt it?' John asked. 'Why does she not put it out to nurse, and place the mother under care also? She surely is not going to burden herself with all this weight of care and responsibility for ever?'

'I do not think she knows yet what it will be best to do, and I feel as if it would not be right to leave her until she sees her way more clearly, for this would only be to add to her anxiety.'

'And take away her chief comfort?' said John.

'Yes,' she said; 'I think I am a comfort to her, and it is a happiness to be so. She feels this to be such a heavy trial on account of all the trouble and expense to Mr. Prescott. You know, John, Minnie has not a penny in the world. Her little fortune—three thousand pounds it was—had all disappeared. Her husband had sold out every farthing of it.'

'Poor Minnie,' he said again, as he and so many others had said so frequently before.

'Poor Minnie indeed!' Esther repeated. 'And I remember well how people used to envy her when first she came to live here. I often think of the remarks that I have heard made about her by the servants and others. They used to say it was a shame that she should have everything, as she seemed to have, beauty, and riches, and such good friends. I have often heard her envied.'

'And have envied her yourself?' said John.

'Yes; but not for any of these things, John. I could

never have envied her for anything but the love she won for herself——'

'From whom?'

'From Mrs. Prescott, whom I loved so much, John.'

If she had envied her any other love, she was not going to confess it.

And John would not press her to do so—at all events, not yet.

They returned to the subject of Minnie and her sorrow, and Esther asked if John knew whether anything had been heard of Alfred Dent.

'No,' he replied; 'nor do I think anything ever will be heard of him. A more clever, as well as a worse man, I believe, never lived.'

'I always felt him to be a bad man,' said Esther, speaking, however, not hardly, but regretfully. 'It used to astonish me to see how taken Minnie was by him, even when I knew nothing whatever against him. There was something in his very look and voice that made me shrink from him.' And again she said: 'I cannot understand Minnie's marrying him.'

'Perhaps it was the discipline she needed,' said John; 'we cannot tell. I often think how true it is that no one can understand the Book of God's Providence until they study its pages with the light of Eternity shining upon them. Perhaps no other trial than this would have had the effect that God intended on Minnie's character.'

'It does not seem to be producing any good effect just now,' said Esther. 'If you could only see her, John, how miserable and sullen she is, and I believe very ill too, though the doctors say they cannot discover anything really the matter with her.'

'Poor thing,' said John, 'she must have been very devoted to that fellow.'

'And yet, John, it cannot have been true devotion. For

if it had been, surely she must have loved him through all. Surely her chief thought, even now, would be of him, and of his child; her one desire to know what had become of him, to win him back to her, to love her child for his sake, and seek to bring it up to love him too, and pray for him. But it is not. Mrs. Prescott has tried to rouse her by speaking of him, of his sin, and the misery it must be bringing him. And she will not hear his name mentioned.'

'We must not judge her, Esther; we cannot tell what may be in her heart.'

But Esther was right.

Minnie Davis's love for Alfred Dent had, from the very beginning, been built upon a shifting, insecure foundation of gratified vanity, and earthly passion, and worldly hopes. Her vanity was humiliated, her passion was disappointed, her hopes were crushed, and her love was gone—and worse than gone.

CHAPTER XLVII.

COMMINATION.

It was Ash-Wednesday—the first day of the saddest season of the Church—and Mr. Abbott was returning from morning service with little Margery.

Margery had not liked the service at all. She was just beginning to enjoy going to church, and to realize that, young as she was, she was old enough to take a personal interest in its sacred services, every one of which her mother sought to lead her to understand and appreciate, and apply to the circumstances and interests even of her youthful life; and very often had Mrs. Abbott remarked to her husband that Margery's simple faith was a proof of the oneness of the spirit that dwells in all God's children. The same fundamental principles underlie every life based on love to God, whether it be that of the youngest and weakest child in the Great Father's family, or that of the oldest and most advanced. The first faint tones of the little child's feeble voice joining in the great Song of the Redeemed is as precious to the ear of the Master of the harmonies as the deeper, fuller notes of the most experienced singer.

Little Margery Abbott often prayed many real prayers as she knelt beside her father in the church of St. Simon and St. Jude, and she often joined in the singing, not only in

perfect tune, but with true understanding, and in the Spirit of God.

But to-day there had been no chanting and no anthems, and only one very mournful hymn, which was quite beyond her understanding, and with which her little joyful heart had no sympathy, and she was walking home beside her father, thinking within herself that she was glad Ash-Wednesday only came once a year, and that she wished it did not come at all, when they met a friend of Mr. Abbott's.

'You are returning from church,' he said, as he passed them.

'And you are not?' replied Mr. Abbott.

'No,' he said, 'I don't care to go to church to hear my neighbours cursed. I always take a walk instead on Ash-Wednesday.'

And he passed on.

'Father,' said Margery, 'we don't go to church to hear our neighbours cursed, do we?'

'Certainly not, Margery. Did not mother tell you yesterday why I was going to church with you to-day, instead of going down to the office?'

'Yes, father; she said it was because this was the first day in Lent.'

'And Lent is ——?'

'A time appointed by the Church for people to think about their sins, and of all that Jesus suffered to save them from them. I know all that, father, quite well. They should try in Lent, for forty days before Easter, to think of all they have done wrong, and how they can do better.'

'And Ash-Wednesday, to-day, Margery, is the first of these days.'

'I know that, father, and I know too why it is called Ash-Wednesday: because the people who had done naughty things used to come into the church dressed in sackcloth,

with bare feet, and prayers were said over them, and ashes sprinkled on their faces. I told Godfrey about it, and what do you think he said, father?—that he wished that people did it now, for he should like to see it; it would be so funny. But I don't think it would be funny at all. I think it would be dreadful, and that it's a very good thing they don't do it now, don't you, father?'

'I certainly think it must have been as you say, dreadful to see, Margery; but I don't know whether I agree with you in thinking that it is a good thing that nothing at all of that kind is done now. Perhaps if the discipline of the Church were restored, it might help to keep people from sinning, and might teach them to be sorry for having sinned.'

'What is discipline, father?'

'Training, Margery; regulating people; making them obey laws, and do what is right, and punishing them when they do wrong.'

'Mother disciplines me,' said Margery, who had experienced something of this on the previous day.

'Very wisely, Margery, and you will feel the benefit of her discipline all your life.'

Then, after a short silence, she returned to the idea which had prompted her first question.

'The clergyman does not curse the people, father? I don't quite know what cursing is, but it is something very wicked, is it not? I heard Smythson say once he had sent the stable-boy away because it was awful to hear him curse and swear.'

'Cursing and swearing, Margery, are like many other things, right or wrong, according to how, and by whom, and for what purpose they are done. To curse is to pronounce evil. For one sinful person to do this to another, in the spirit of anger and revenge, is a great sin—the greatest of all sins, because the most contrary to the greatest of all

God's laws—the law of love and charity and forgiveness—you can understand this, Margery?'

'Yes, of course, father. But the clergyman does not do this?'

'Indeed he does not. The clergyman does not curse the people at all when he reads those solemn sentences you heard in church to-day. All he does is to read out of God's Holy Law, Margery, the judgments which God Himself pronounced on Mount Sinai, by the mouth of Moses, against all those who should break His Commandments. The Church orders this to be done, in love for the souls of men, in order that they may remember what God's Commandments are, and be warned of the danger of breaking them, and of the judgment that is sure to follow. We must remember God's threatenings as well as God's promises. The same love prompts them both. What did I hear mother say to you only this morning, when mademoiselle told her that you had not learned your lessons properly?'

'That the next time she complained of me I should not come into her room in the evening.'

'That was a threat, Margery, an announcement of what would happen if you did wrong again. And what has mother promised if there is not a single complaint about the French you dislike so much between this time and your birthday?'

'That she will let me have the watch my godmother gave me.'

'That is a promise, Margery. And when do you think mother loved you most, when she threatened, or when she promised?'

'Just the same, father.'

'Exactly, Margery. The same love that makes parents hold out promises to their children, and leads them to reward them when they do right, makes them also warn them of the punishments which they will give them if

they do wrong. Do you understand about the curses now, Margery?'

'Yes, father.' And then she added, showing how much more children often think about what they hear than people imagine: 'But I did not understand before, father. I knew Mr. Weatherby was not cursing the people as Mr. Alcott said, but it frightened me to hear all those curses, father, and I did not like to say "Amen," as mother tells me always to say.'

'Why not, Margery?'

'Because I know "Amen" means "so be it," and those curses sounded so dreadful. I did not like to say "Amen" to them.'

Mr. Abbott smiled. It was very gratifying to see that her mother's teaching had not been lost on little Margery.

'"Amen" means "so it *is*," Margery, as well as "so *be* it." When the people use it after these sentences, they use it just as they do when they say it after the Creeds. It is not only meant to show that their heart has gone up with the prayer the minister has just offered, but that they know what he has said to be quite true, and feel it to be right.'

No more passed about the Commination Service between little Margery and her father.

Mr. Abbott repeated the conversation to his wife, and this led to a renewal of the subject.

'It is a very awful service,' he said, 'a great deal more awful than dear little Margery imagines, though she shrank from the very sound of the words which she could not possibly have understood. It seemed more solemn than ever to me this morning.'

'So it did to me,' said Mrs. Abbott. 'I think this is because we have come nearer to sin; it has touched us more closely just of late than ever before. I was thinking of Mr. Denman, and all this dreadful dishonesty.'

'And I was thinking of that poor young Dent. News

came of him this morning, Maggie. He has been arrested at Queenstown, on the eve of sailing for America, and is now in gaol. The missing notes were found on him.'

Mrs. Abbott's face expressed the interest she felt.

'It seems so strange,' she said, 'that they did not find out his character better before this. Ruth knew that he was a bad man long ago.'

'Because Prescott took the trouble to find out. If he had not had a reason for making very careful inquiries into his character, I dare say he would not have suspected him of being what he is. And he never imagined him to be dishonest, though he knew him to be unprincipled.'

'And his employers never suspected him either?'

'No, not in the least. He was an excellent man of business—as clever in his work as in everything else—and the books were kept in perfect order. Indeed, they put up with a good deal, because they valued his services so much. It seems that he made them believe that his frequent absences were occasioned by his bad health. It was only after he had decamped that they discovered that a considerable sum of money was missing, and then they made the further discovery that by false entries, and giving receipts for moneys which he had appropriated to his own purposes, he had been robbing them for months past. Although, of course, I feel that it is our own heart and life which we have to examine on such a day as this, and it is of our own sins that we are called to repent, I could not, with this news fresh in my mind, help thinking of him when God's minister read of the dreadful judgment hanging over the heads of those who go astray from the commandments of God.'

'His poor young wife!' said Mrs. Abbott. 'It is to be hoped she will never know this.'

'I do not think she ever will, Maggie. Prescott tells me

that the doctor has changed his opinion about her. He does not think she will live long.'

'Oh, William! and *she*, too, is hardening her heart against God's judgments, and refusing even to hear of His mercies. Ruth is miserable about her.'

'You must tell Ruth to be less unhappy and to have more faith.'

'I do, William; and I have prayed much for her this morning myself—for her, and for Minnie too.'

Which prayers were at that moment beginning to be answered.

For on her return from church that morning with her mind full of the news which she also had heard, Ruth observed a change in Minnie, both as regarded the expression of her face and the tone of her voice.

She looked deadly ill, but the stony expression of her countenance was changed for one of utter sadness; and when Ruth, encouraged by this to make the inquiry which of late she had not dared to make, asked her how she was, she answered, in a voice which had lost its hardness:

'Very miserable.'

Ruth never knew of the terrible conflict that had passed in that stricken soul during those lonely morning hours, but she thanked God, with tears of gratitude, for the results of that conflict, when Minnie said:

'Will you read to me? I should like you to read to me;' adding, 'something about God's mercy—His mercy to the wilful and the wicked.'

Ruth's Prayer-book was in her hand. She came fresh from hearing, not only of God's certain judgments, but of His ever-ready forgiveness. So she opened it at the Commination Service, the words of which were still sounding in her heart, and read the sentences which tell of Him, Jesus Christ the righteous, wounded for our offences, smitten for our wickedness, made the propitiation for our sins,

for whose sake the Lord God is willing to receive and to pardon all who come to Him with faithful repentance.

Then she read the fifty-first Psalm—that wonderful confession of true penitence which, offered through ages of time by thousands of repenting sinners of all characters, and under all circumstances, has been found equally appropriate to each—and then, kneeling by the couch on which Minnie lay, she humbly, scarcely able to restrain her tears, repeated the three concluding prayers of the Commination Service which she herself had already offered for Minnie that morning in church.

To every prayer Minnie uttered a faint, yet earnest, 'Amen.'

And as Ruth was about to rise from her knees, her poor friend's arms were thrown round her neck, and her voice, broken with sobs, whispered:

'I do bewail and lament my sins. I do believe in Jesus. Oh pray that it may not be too late; that the door may not be shut.'

And Ruth prayed again, marvelling herself even then, and much more afterwards, at the courage which was given to her to ask for forgiveness, not only for Minnie herself, but for her husband.

Bending lovingly over her afterwards to kiss and comfort her, she was shocked to see how yet more ill she looked. But still she found courage to say:

'You know, dear, the Lord Jesus Himself has said: "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."'

Minnie did not answer, save by a trembling lip, and the faint colour that found its way into her white face.

But that night, when Ruth, as usual, knelt to repeat the prayers she always offered beside the sick-bed, every prayer was responded to, and as Ruth was rising from her knees she said:

'I do forgive him. May God forgive us both. I gave up God for his sake, and God has punished me justly.'

'But in wrath He has remembered mercy, Minnie,' Ruth answered softly. 'He has made you to hear the terrible voice of His most just judgment in this world, that you may not hear it in the world to come. The day of salvation is not over for you.'

'But the night is coming very soon,' she answered. 'I feel its shadows gathering more thickly every day.'

'You will let Mr. Heathcote come to see you?'

And Minnie consented to the request which, until now, she had so resolutely refused.

This consent Ruth telegraphed to her father almost at daybreak next morning, and, to her thankful delight, he was able to come at once.

'You need not fear, Ruthie,' he said, as he found her waiting with anxiety to hear what one so far more experienced than herself thought of this anxious case. 'The hard heart is broken. Minnie's contrition is real. The axe has been put to the very root of the tree, that it may yet bring forth fruit. That poor child has indeed been the object of God's purging fan, but it has been that the chaff may be burnt in this life, and the wheat may yet be gathered into His barn.'

'She will not recover from this illness,' said Ruth, an earnest longing in her heart that Minnie might be spared to show by her future conduct that she had really submitted herself to God, and taken upon her His easy yoke and light burden—so light and easy, compared to the weight of unbelief and hardness of heart. 'You do not think she will recover?'

'No,' he replied, 'I do not; nor do I think that it is to be desired that she should. There is not much prospect of happiness for her in this life, and hers would never be a nature to bear the burden of trouble bravely.'

'But it would be such comfort to see her walking in God's ways,' said Ruth. 'She has been so self-willed, so bent on following her own way, and just of late, so unforgiving and hard. I have been so miserable about her.'

'That it would have been your great happiness to have seen her following her Saviour in lowliness, patience, and charity, consenting gladly to be ordered by the governance of His Holy Spirit, seeking always His glory, and serving Him duly with thanksgiving,' Mr. Heathcote answered, quoting the words of the service which Ruth had told him had been carried home to Minnie's heart.

'The very greatest,' she replied.

'I am afraid this will not be granted, Ruthie. But enough has been given in answer to your prayers to fill you with grateful love to God. I believe that you will yet meet your dear Minnie at the Father's Right Hand, there to receive with you the gracious benediction which He will pronounce on all penitent and believing souls, as He bids them take possession of the glorious kingdom into which He has vouchsafed to bring them, for His infinite mercy.'

CHAPTER XLVIII.

FORM OF PRAYER TO BE USED AT SEA.

In the meantime, while Minnie Dent lay on her sick-bed in Mr. Prescott's home, Richard Taylor, who, for her sake, had left his native country, and taken his mother, unwillingly, with him, lay on a bed of far greater bodily suffering, and of equal mental pain—a sailor watching beside him, his face the only familiar one amidst the strange faces that surrounded him—his voice the only one of which he could understand a single word.

Saved as by a miracle, delivered, as it were, out of the jaws of the death which was ready to swallow him up, in one of those fearful catastrophes which might make us doubt the providential goodness and the protecting power of a merciful God, did we not know that His judgments are unsearchable and His ways past finding out, Richard Taylor had been led by the peril, from which he had been delivered, to the knowledge of the glorious and gracious and powerful Lord God, whom, when all things were safe and quiet about him, he had forgotten, and worse than forgotten. For great as is the sin of forgetting God, and refusing to hearken to the still voice of His Word, and to obey His Commandments, far greater is the sin of professing to serve Him, whilst there is no love for Him, no real belief in Him. And of this sin Richard Taylor had been guilty, and to the sense of this sin he had been

aroused by the terrible things which God had showed him, and by the special manner in which He, Whose mercy is over all His works, had extended that mercy to him, and powerfully and wonderfully defended him.

It was on a bright, clear morning in December that Richard Taylor and his mother had sailed for Australia, almost the only cabin passengers in an emigrant ship, carrying several hundreds of steerage passengers.

A splendid vessel she was, in every respect, well-built, and fully equipped, and thoroughly well commanded. But Richard's special reason for sailing in her was that the captain was a personal friend of Mrs. Job Taylor, born in the same town, and intimate with her all her life; and the fact that this would be a comfort to her had helped to quiet the reproaches of conscience which he sometimes felt at the thought of having—for the sake of his own pride and mortification—uprooted his mother from the home which she had made for herself.

Spoiled as he had been all his life by the mother who had lived solely for him, and would at any time have been ready to sacrifice her dearest hopes and interests in order to give her only son an hour's happiness, Richard had never been accustomed to consult very closely her feelings or her wishes. But when they stood together on the Plymouth docks on that wintry afternoon, and he observed how old and worn she looked, really ten years older then she had appeared one year ago, his heart did rather reproach him for selfishness.

Amidst the crowds of emigrants who were assembling for embarkation, though all were poor, and the faces of many were sad at the approaching separation from friends and country, he did not observe one that looked as downcast or regretful as did that of the elderly woman, who had plenty of money in her own home, and only one son to inherit it.

Life was before those poor people. They were going out in search of better fortune in a new land. Hope of future good and happiness either for themselves or for their children was bestowing a 'silver lining' on every cloud of regret, or doubt, or self-denial.

But all Mrs. Job Taylor's hopes, for this world at all events, seemed destined to be blighted. Personal happiness was a thing she had ceased to care for. She lived in the happiness of her son. To see him happy, comfortably settled in a home of his own, eating the labour of his hands, with the wife of his youth, and his children like olive branches round about his table, had been the one desire of her heart.

But this hope had been crushed by Minnie Davis: she would not marry him, and he would never marry anyone else. Nor would he consent to remain where he might be called upon to see her the wife of another, settled in a home that was not his, perhaps with little ones around her calling another man father. So he made up his mind to leave the country, and his mother insisted on going with him, though this he had neither urged, nor indeed greatly desired.

And because—although it was now several years since they had heard of him—they believed Job Taylor to be still somewhere in America, they decided on making a home in Australia, of which country they knew a good deal from the captain of the ship in which they took their passage.

All went well for the first few weeks—better, indeed, in every way than Mrs. Job Taylor could have hoped or expected, had she cared to form any hopes or expectations, which she had not.

Though the number of steerage passengers was so large, the accommodation for cabin passengers was very limited, and there was only one family besides themselves—that of a clergyman, going out with his wife and daughter in the hopes

of recruiting the health which had given way at home in long and active service in Christ's church.

One look at Mrs. Job Taylor inspired him with interest in her. An hour's conversation showed him that he had not been mistaken in thinking that a woman with such a face, so deeply lined with the marks of sorrow and mental discipline, must have a history. Before ten days had passed, their acquaintance had strengthened into friendship, and, reserved as Mrs. Job Taylor still was, she had told him as much of that history as she could have told to anyone.

Morning and evening prayers were daily read on board the ship by this good man; and many besides Mrs. Job Taylor were thankful for the help and comfort thus afforded to them. The clergyman often expressed his thankful surprise at seeing how well this daily service was attended; but Richard Taylor was never present. His mother never urged him to come, for to urge Richard to do anything was but to strengthen him in his determination not to do it. But often her heart went up in prayer for him, as she left him on these bright mornings, or calm clear evenings, standing gloomily looking over the sea, or gazing at the clouds, and went herself to join in prayers and thanksgivings to the eternal Lord God, who alone spreads out the heavens, and compasses the waters day and night with bounds.

Gradually, under the healthful physical influence of this prosperous sea-voyage, which winds and tides combined in making as smooth and pleasant as possible, and under the soothing spiritual influence of daily prayer and instruction in God's Holy Word, and constant Christian companionship, Mrs. Job Taylor grew happier, and fresh hopes for herself and her son found place in her heart. Richard was young still, and though a wound would take longer to heal in his heart than in other young people's, time was a great healer, and God was a yet greater, and she need not despair. Even if they never returned in safety, as the collect worded it, to

enjoy again the blessings of their own land, they might yet taste the fruits of fresh labours in a new country, serving God there in peace and quietness, and praising and glorifying Him with a thankful remembrance of His mercies. Little did she imagine when praying thus, in renewed hope and quietness of mind, in what way these prayers would be answered.

They had nearly reached the Equator, and were off the Azores when, on one especially calm night, the catastrophe occurred.

Mrs. Job Taylor had lingered long on deck that evening, enjoying with her new friends the stillness of the air; but at length she and they had gone to rest and were sleeping soundly.

Richard Taylor had remained on deck. It was a night to be remembered by him, with special bitterness and misery, for it was the anniversary of the evening on which he had gone to plead his suit—for the last time he had said to himself it should be—with Minnie Davis, and had found that it was indeed to be for the last time, for she had received it by telling him that she was engaged to Alfred Dent. As he sat now on deck, leaning over the side of the vessel, where the lights were burning brightly, gazing down into the still waters, for it was a fine night, though dark, he could there see only Minnie's face, with the look on it which it had worn when he saw her for that last time, such a cruel look as it had seemed to him, radiant and hopeful with her own happiness, utterly regardless of his misery.

There were several people about: sailors going to and fro, giving and answering orders, and passengers lingering on deck. Richard took little heed of any of them, though in a manner aware of all that was going on. He saw the quartermaster come to the wheel and the look-out relieved. He heard the emigrants' watchman reporting that all was well every half hour, and the quartermaster reporting the side-lights to be

burning brightly. He observed the first officer going forward frequently, and heard him give the order to keep a good watch, for the ship was going very quickly through the water, and they might come across a vessel at any moment. Later on, he was able to give evidence correctly on these and other points, though at the time he seemed absorbed in his own thoughts and recollections, until suddenly there was a cry from the look-out:

'A sail on the lee-bow, sir!'

The cry was repeated all along the deck. Richard did not repeat it, or utter a sound, but seeing the first officer walk to the lee side of the poop, he followed him, feeling a sort of protection in doing so, although quite ignorant of the meaning of what he had heard, or of the danger that was at hand. There he distinctly saw a vessel quite close, and he heard the order given to 'put the helm hard down,' but was still unaware that a collision was close at hand. The captain came up at that moment, and hearing, in answer to his inquiry, that 'the helm was hard down,' expressed his opinion that 'all was right, and she would go clear.' But one instant after he exclaimed in a tone which in itself told Richard how great was the danger involved in the discovery:

'My God, she's put her helm down, and will be into us!'

A few moments afterwards, and the ship was struck with such violence as to cut her right through to the keel, the bowsprit and jibboom of the vessel they had only just perceived being right across the deck of their ill-fated ship.

For the first time perhaps in his life, Richard Taylor's first thought was for his mother. Whatever his faults might be, cowardice was not among them, and he retained his composure, as he scanned eagerly the faces of the panic-struck passengers who crowded on deck, seeing several killed on the spot by the spars falling around, whilst

through all the horrors of the scene he heard the firm voice of the captain calling to know what ship it was that had done such cruelty by carelessness. But nowhere could he see his mother. Nor was there much time for search, for the forepart of the ship was already beginning to break away.

He heard the first officer, whom he had seen push his way through the crowd of horror-struck emigrants, and run rapidly to the other side of the main deck, tell the captain that there was no hope; and almost instantly after the stranger ship that had worked such destruction backed out, and the noble vessel, with its brave captain and its stout-hearted crew, and its hundreds of souls, heeled over and sank, within three or four minutes from the first moment when the fatal blow had been struck; barely seven minutes from the time when the cry from the look-out had roused Richard Taylor from his thoughts of Minnie Davis, and the life she had blighted.

Ah, it was not her face that he saw before him, or her voice that he heard in his ears, as he clung fast to some railings near him, bewildered almost to madness by the noise of the woodwork breaking up all around, the crashing of the masts as they gave way, and above all the fearful shrieks of the dying and the drowning.

A few seconds later and the railings to which he clung were swept with him into the sea.

Happily for him, and as one result of his previous sojourn in another land than his own, he was a good swimmer, and being a powerful man, he succeeded in rising again and again to the surface, though at first swept down deep by the ship's suction, and afterwards getting frequently entangled in the rigging, and receiving terrible blows and cuts from the broken vessel; all the while fully conscious of the heart-rending shrieks around him, though unable to pay any heed to them in his own hard struggle for life.

With difficulty, for his bruises and cuts were beginning to hurt terribly, he succeeded in reaching a barrel floating in front of him, but had just realized the impossibility of holding on to it, when, at a short distance, he saw a boat floating bottom upwards, and by one last effort, for which only despair could have given him strength, he had managed to reach it and get on it, when he heard voices and perceived a boat pulling towards him.

He had just enough consciousness remaining to recognise the face of the first officer as one of the men in her, after which he remembered nothing until he came to himself in the cabin of the ship which had struck the blow.

Ten days had passed since then, during which it would be difficult to say how many times he had lived over again those fearful scenes both in his waking and in his sleeping hours.

It had indeed been an awful time for Richard Taylor, and yet, notwithstanding the pain of body he endured, and the far greater misery of mind, notwithstanding the grief of his heart at the loss of his mother, the mother whose life had been sacrificed to gratify his self-will, and whom he never knew how much he had loved until now, this was in very truth the most blessed time of all his life to Richard Taylor.

For it brought him to Christ. Lying on a bed of suffering, aching still in every limb, he had remembered psalms and passages from the Holy Gospels which he had learned *by rote* at the Sunday School in Little Burton, years ago—learned so correctly that he had often heard himself held up as an example to other lads—but which he had never learned *by heart* until now, when it almost seemed as if another voice than his own repeated them over and over to him, generally to his deep remorse, sometimes to his hope and comfort. Chief amongst these passages of Scripture were those two Psalms, both of which he had learned as a boy, to neither of which he had paid any heed, the sixty-sixth and the one hundred and seventh.

Now his own experience seemed just an illustration of them both.

God had indeed proved him and tried him, brought him into the snare and laid trouble upon him, but in His infinite goodness and mercy He had held his soul in life, and when he had given all up for lost, had mercifully looked upon him and wonderfully commanded a deliverance.

And now, as deeply sensible of the mercy shown to him as he had been of his danger in the hour of his distress, Richard Taylor, for the first time in his life, truly sought unto the Lord, without whose help the waters must have drowned him, and the stream must have gone over his soul.

And God did not cast out his prayer, remembering, doubtless, also those other prayers which had gone before his, and prepared the way for their finding a gracious acceptance. He did not deal with him according to his sins, nor reward him according to his iniquities, but heard his cry, and did great things for him.

Later on we shall see what was to be the effect on Richard Taylor's heart and life of this great deliverance.

CHAPTER XLIX.

BURIAL OF THE DEAD.

The bell of the church of St. Simon and St. Jude was tolling, and Margery Abbott did not like to hear it. It made her feel more sad than ever, and she had been very sad for some time. The pain of leaving her beautiful home had perhaps been greater to her than to either of her parents, though no one seemed to perceive it. Mrs. Abbott was kept up by the thought of her husband, by the strong resolve that he should not see that it was a very great grief, and by the feeling that while he was spared to her she dared not, nor could she, grieve overmuch for the loss of anything beside. Mr. Abbott was kept up by the thought of his wife, and his determination to render every sacrifice that had to be made as light as possible for her. And others had helped to enable him to carry out this determination beyond his fondest expectations.

'Indeed, you must not do so,' his wife had said to him when he had expressed his intention of not allowing the contents of her boudoir to be put into the sale of furniture, books, and ornaments which had taken place; 'indeed, William, you must not do so. It would distress me more than I can say. Some of these, some special treasures, I have set aside myself: the head of Psyche that you gave me on our wedding trip, your first present after our marriage; the statue of Ariadne, which you brought home to me the day

Margery was born ; and one or two other treasures. But the chief part must be sold. You know, William, you have always insisted on the best of everything being placed either in my bedroom or in my boudoir, that I might have the pleasure of seeing them constantly. They will fetch a high price, many of them, and they must be sold. The money is not ours—we owe it to others.'

Mr. Abbott's only answer had been a kiss. But in that kiss was expressed all the love, all the gratitude, and all the deep respect he felt for the brave wife whom God had given him to be so true a helpmeet to him.

He was not present at the sale, and he never alluded to the subject again, but he was thankful when the auctioneer told him that 'things had gone capitally, and the sum fetched would be even larger than he had led him to expect,' and he was yet more thankful when he added, 'Mr. Prescott bought in almost everything from the boudoir, and many things from the best bedroom also.'

And when Mr. Abbott next went to the small house which he had hired for a year—the very house on the hill which had been vacated by Mrs. Job Taylor, and which she had enlarged and made comfortable, in the hope of its being a permanent home for her son and his future family—to make arrangements for its furnishing, he found two rooms completely furnished, the two front rooms, one of which he had told his friend, Mr. Prescott, he intended for his wife's bedroom, and the other for her private sitting-room.

Now he understood why Mr. Prescott had way-laid him on his way thither, and entered the house with him, having previously desired the upholsterer who was to meet them there to be 'later than the hour mentioned, as he and Mr. Abbott had some business to transact.'

'It is your doing,' he said, as they passed from one room to the other; 'but, indeed, Prescott, I cannot allow it. It is too much.'

'I have nothing to do with it,' Mr. Prescott answered; 'it is Ruthie's doing entirely, her thought and her doing altogether. But, Abbott, you must not say to her what you have just said to me; it would distress her greatly. She has quite a different idea of things. And allow me to say that I think her ideas are right and yours wrong. What can be "too much" when it is a token of true love?'

And thus the matter had been settled; and when the sweet invalid had taken possession of the pretty rooms which the truest love had thus thoughtfully and tastefully arranged for her comfort and pleasure, her ideas concerning them agreed more with those of her friends than with her husband's.

'I know it is a great happiness to you to have given me this happiness,' she said, as Ruth sat on a low seat beside her couch on the same morning, while the bell tolled on, sending forth its two sad strokes at every minute; 'and now I will tell you a secret for your reward—the best reward for your love and goodness I know it will be. No one could ever have guessed, Ruthie, no one but you must ever know now how my little foolish heart clung to all these household gods of mine. Even as a child, they used to laugh at me for my affection for what my brothers called my "things." When they came home, one from college and the other from his regiment, they were sure to bring me some little love-token, saying, laughingly, that "they were for one or other of my many 'shrines.'" And since I have been an invalid, especially since I have been confined to my two rooms, my "things" have become quite companions to me, and have cheered many a solitary hour, not only with associations of past days, but with many sweet, fresh ideas which they continually suggested to me.'

'And yet you were so ready to give them up! And no one who did not know what a clever little dissembler you are when the question is one that concerns your own feel-

ings, would ever have perceived that you were making the slightest sacrifice.'

'Everything is by comparison, Ruthie. It would not have distressed me half as much to part with every treasure that I possess as to have felt that William had spent money which he can ill afford for my sake, while he was selling his horses and his dogs, and giving up every luxury and amusement of his own. So now,' she added, 'let this thought, the thought of the great happiness you have given me, comfort you on this sad morning, when your pale face tells me how heavy your heart is. You are quite resolved to go to the funeral yourself? Is not this a little self-willed, Ruthie?'

'I don't think so. I hope not. I feel as if I must go—as if I could not leave anything undone that might help to show my sorrow, not only my sorrow for her, but my regret for all that has passed. It is indeed a sad day for me, the saddest funeral that I have ever attended.'

'And yet you have every hope that Minnie is in Paradise?'

'Yes,' said Ruth; 'for Christ is the Resurrection and the Life, and he that believeth in Him, though he were dead, yet shall he live. I feel confident that she did truly believe in the Redeemer; and I comfort myself with these words, that whosoever believeth in Him shall never die. But when the life has not been in accordance with this faith, one cannot feel the same comfort.'

'Of course not,' said Mrs. Abbott. 'The hope is not sure and certain.'

'As it was when darling Harold died,' replied Ruth. 'How different a day this is to the day when we stood round his grave, and the doctor himself threw the earth upon the coffin, and said those words in that solemn voice of his. It almost seemed as though we had as much cause for thankfulness as for grief; for the hope then *was* sure and certain—we *knew* that his body would rise with the Lord Jesus Christ in the Resurrection, and be made like unto His

glorious body, according to His mighty working, whereby He is able to subdue all things to Himself.'

'You seem to know the service by heart, Ruthie,' said Mrs. Abbott.

'I do know a great part of it,' she answered. 'All that part certainly. That day it almost seemed as if *we* also could hear a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, from henceforth blessed are the dead which die in the Lord."'

'Darling little fellow,' said Mrs. Abbott, 'he had not many labours to rest from.'

'No, but he would have had, if he had lived. Helen often says so. Such an energetic, inquiring, eager mind as his would have found many problems in life hard to solve. She often says that if his life had been spared it would probably have been for a continual strain in the effort to do good and overcome evil, and no doubt he would have had to suffer many disappointments and discouragements. I remember well her words to me that day as we left the church: "The Lord gave him to me, and the Lord hath taken him away, and He gives me faith to say, Blessed be the Name of the Lord."'

'There will be no Holy Communion to-day, as there was then; will there?'

'No; and I am not sorry, though that "Funeral Eucharist" seemed, and indeed was, the chief means of comfort to us all. We felt as if by it we declared to ourselves and others that we fully recognised that our darling was not gone away from us, even though we had laid his body in the ground for a while. Only for a while, just a temporary separation whilst the soul was waiting in Paradise for the day of resurrection and re-union. Our dear one had passed from personal communion with us, but not from spiritual communion. We felt him to be still a living member of the True Vine, taken out of our sight, indeed, but only to be sheltered in the Paradise of God from all the

rough winds and biting frosts which we had still to endure here. Those were his father's words. I have often thought of them since. I wish they brought me the same comfort now that they did then. That bell would not be sending such sorrow to my soul.'

Mrs. Abbott would have spoken some more words of comfort to her, with just an undertone of reproof in them, if at that moment Margery had not appeared to say that all the others were waiting for 'Auntie Ruth,' as she always called her mother's chief friend.

'And who are all the others, Margery?' asked Mrs. Abbott, who knew that Ruth was anxious on the subject.

'Mr. Prescott, and Mr. and Mrs. Moorhouse, mother, are in the dining-room; and I heard them say that Esther and Mr. Grainger and Hannah had gone to the church. They are going to the funeral, are they not, mother?'

'And you are going to stay here with me till Auntie Ruth comes back.'

Which Margery was delighted to do, for she had found it dull work, standing in her new nursery listening to that mournful bell, while Auntie Ruth was in her mother's room.

With her mother, nothing ever seemed dull or sad. The bell continued to toll, but she no longer paid any attention to it; and when Mrs. Abbott said: 'We have had no morning reading, Margery—Auntie Ruth interrupted us just when we were going to begin,' she went gladly to fetch her Bible, and opened it at the accustomed place.

'I think, Margery, we will read elsewhere to-day. You shall read me the ninetieth psalm, or the thirty-ninth, whichever you like best.'

Margery inquired why, and her mother told her 'because they would be reading one or other of those psalms in church, and she would like to be listening to them at the same time as Auntie Ruth.'

So then she read them both, in her sweet clear voice, and

with the reverence with which she had been taught to read the Bible ever since she could read at all. As a reward, it always seemed to Mrs. Abbott as though the Bible-words never sounded so sweetly in her ears as when read by her little daughter.

The reading ended, Margery inquired which of these two psalms would have been read in church, and when her mother told her that she thought it would be the thirty-ninth, she asked 'Why?'

'Because Mr. Heathcote generally reads that psalm when it is a young person who is being buried.'

Which information called for another 'why' from Margery, with whom the interrogative was a very favourite form of speech.

Mrs. Abbott made her read the sixth verse again, and explained to her what a short measure a span was, and told her how this psalm had, perhaps, been composed by David after the death of his young son Absolom, when his captain, Joab, had come to him to reproach him for allowing his people to see him in too much grief.

Then, telling her that the ninetieth psalm had been composed by Moses in the wilderness, when he was already an old man, she made her read again the tenth verse, and showed her why this psalm was more suitable to be used at the funeral of the aged.

'I suppose,' said Margery, 'it was read at old Mr. Graham's funeral, mother. He was such a very old man. Harold often told me stories about him.'

'But there are several verses in this psalm that are quite as fit for young people, even children like you, Margery,' said Mrs. Abbott. 'You see there are two verses which you often repeat in your own prayers, and that perhaps mother repeats yet oftener when she is praying for her little Margery, and asking God that "He may teach her so to number her days that she may apply her heart unto

wisdom," or "to satisfy her with His mercy, and that soon, so that she may rejoice and be glad all the days of her life," not only now, when she is young and merry, and everything goes well, but by-and-by, when she gets old, and trouble and sorrow come.'

Margery was silent for an unusually long time, and then she said:

'I am not always merry, mother, and things don't always go well, and even little girls like me have trouble and sorrow sometimes.'

And there was such sadness in her voice that Mrs. Abbott's heart reproached her for having perhaps not sought to discover sufficiently how far the trials which she strove so diligently to make as light as possible for her husband, and was bearing so bravely herself, might be weighing on her little daughter.

Drawing the child close to her, and making her lay her head on her lap, a very few words of sympathy drew from her the secrets which she had meant to keep to herself, because she had heard Eglinton say to Smythson that 'she never saw anyone like the mistress—not a murmur or complaint escaped her lips, though it must be a terrible trial to leave her home;' and she, Margery, wanted to be like mother. So she, too, in her childish experience, had been realizing something of what the psalmist felt in a very different way, when he restrained the words that were burning within him, and strove by silence to extinguish sorrow and discontent.

But the effort to hold her tongue and speak nothing had truly been pain and grief to her also; and now when her mother, even her own dear, sympathizing mother, spoke as though everything went well with little girls, and they ought always to be gay and merry, her heart too was hot within her, and her tongue spoke.

Margery never forgot that morning which drew her closer

to her mother than any other day of her life had ever done. Long after that dear mother's frail body had been committed to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, Margery remembered that morning's conversation, and the new view it had opened to her of the life she had begun to live on earth, and must continue to live all through eternity, its nature, its object, and its end. Her spiritual sight could not be expected to be strong enough to see far yet, and the view which her mother set before her was a limited one; but what she saw, she saw clearly.

Sitting beside her mother, with her hand locked in hers, fixing her mind in the direction pointed out to her, she understood that nothing really belongs to anyone but the immortal soul which God has given to each, to be spent in His service. Nothing else do we bring into this world; nothing else can we carry out of it. Though she was still so young, she had seen for herself how uncertain is the character of all earthly possessions, and how, though riches may be heaped up, none can tell who shall gather them. That which is green in the morning, and groweth up, whether it be the life of man or the enjoyments and possessions of that life, may be cut down, dried up, and withered in the evening. The moment that God sees fit to scatter them, they become as a sleep, and fade away suddenly like the grass.

These were rather grave thoughts for Mrs. Abbott to be bringing home to the mind of a merry little maiden like Margery, but that morning, instead of saddening yet more the heart which was already beginning to taste of the cup of this world's bitterness, they soothed and comforted it.

'God does not take away people's things, or let their friends die, mother, because He is angry with them?' she asked, the thought in her mind being that this certainly could not be the case, or else her father and mother would still be

in their beautiful home, with plenty of servants to wait on them, and the gardener would still be tending the flowers she loved so well in the pleasure-grounds, and the conservatories: and the dear dogs and horses, who had grown to be her personal friends, would all still be in the stables.

'It is not because God is angry, mother, is it?'

'Indeed it is not, Margery; often it is just the reverse. God was not angry with Abraham, His special friend, when He sent him away from his own country, or with Job, that perfect and upright man, when He took from him everything he had in the world. It was because He loved them, to prove their love to Him and bring out all their heavenly virtues, faith, and patience, and hope. But sometimes, Margery, God does punish people in anger, especially His own people.'

'As you and father punish me, mother, when you are angry with me. But you are never angry very long—at least, not if I am sorry.'

'Nor is God, Margery. He sees all our misdeeds; our most secret sins are set in the light of His countenance. But as soon as we repent of them, and apply our hearts unto wisdom, He delivers us from our offences; He removes His heavy hand, and takes away the plague.'

'But it was not because God was angry with you and father that He let that man steal your money—Smythson said it was stealing—so that you and father have lost your beautiful house and all your nice things?'

'I don't think it was, Margery. I think it was to prove our faith, that is, to see whether we were quite willing to give them all up when He asked us to do so, as Abraham was when God told him to slay Isaac.'

Margery reflected for a moment, and then said very decidedly:

'Yes, I suppose that was it; for Eglinton says she never thought that anyone could be as good as you and father,

mother. She said you were a saint, mother, and I know that means someone *very, very* good.'

Mrs. Abbott smiled, a very humble smile. The praise of man had little power to injure one who lived, undisturbed by worldly influences and interruptions, habitually in the presence of God.

CHAPTER L.

BURIAL OF THE DEAD.

MEANWHILE pretty Minnie Dent had been laid to rest in her mother's grave in Little Burton cemetery, where she, one of the most thoughtless and unheeding of all the school-children, had so often played, in defiance of rules and orders, delighting in her wilfulness to jump over the graves, and chase her equally giddy companions in and out amongst them, simply because she was forbidden to do so. Love of her own way, dislike to control, self-chosen amusements and companions, present happiness, disregard of future consequences—these had always been the characteristics which had led those who watched over her to fear for her, although little thinking how speedy would be their results.

And now all was over, and it was no wonder that the little party who had stood round that open grave felt their hearts heavy within them as they thought of that short life so sadly ended, and of that other little life so sadly begun—begun without either of the protecting wings wrapped around it, beneath which it should have been nestling in unconscious safety, its young mother lying in the coffin at their feet, its almost equally young father working out the penal servitude which must last for years, if, indeed, he lived so long. This seemed doubtful, for a very few weeks of prison life and prison discipline had served so to change Alfred Dent, that when Mr. Prescott had gone to see him the week before, he was

on the very point of telling the warder who brought him into his presence that he had mistaken the man, when he recognised him.

He had gone to tell him of his wife's death, wondering much how he would take the news, and scarcely believing the chaplain's prediction that 'he did not think it would make the slightest impression on him.'

'I have had some experience amongst the prisoners here,' he said, 'and I believe that young man is dead, and long has been dead, to everything that does not directly concern himself. You will find him very much changed. His health, such as it was—for I fancy a long life of self-indulgence and dissipation had gone far to undermine it—has broken down more quickly than that of any prisoner I have ever seen. He is utterly wretched, with a sullen, silent despair that it is terrible to witness, but I feel convinced it is only for his own selfish sake. I do not think he even feels remorse, or cares to know what has become of his wife, or if he has a child.'

Mr. Prescott thought the chaplain somewhat hard-judging, but when he came face to face with Alfred Dent, he saw that he was not mistaken.

No shadow of regret, not the faintest trace of emotion passed over his pale face as Mr. Prescott told him of Minnie's death, dwelling on her forgiveness of him, and her prayers for him. The stolid, hardened look never melted as he spoke of the poor little worse than orphaned baby, telling him that John Grainger and Esther were anxious to keep her as their own until such time as his sentence of penal servitude should be over, and pleading with him that he would make the weary years that must pass between this time and that an occasion for repenting of his past sins, and seeking the forgiveness of Him who had visited him with this punishment in His just anger and displeasure.

He left him as he had found him, stern, and cold, and hard, making no reply, not once even raising his eyes to look at him

Mr. Prescott had said very little to Ruth about this visit, for he had no wish to bring a yet sadder picture before her mind than that which he feared haunted it constantly—the picture of her dear Minnie, her pet school-child, her favourite companion, lying on her death-bed, hoping and yet fearing, trusting indeed in Jesus, yet not sufficiently able to realize her own trust to derive any comfort from it, dying with the words, 'I hope in the mercy of my Saviour,' a hope which those who loved her dwelt on with deep thankfulness, but which had not been sufficiently sure and certain in her own heart to bring peace to her anxious face, and which was not sufficiently sure and certain in theirs to enable them to utter the hearty thanks which it is the one great joy of those who mourn their faithful dead to be able to offer to God.

It was a new and painful experience to Ruth, who had never known before what it was to see the spirit of anyone dear to her depart without being sure of their true faith in Christ's Holy Name, without that blessed certainty which is the only consolation in such sorrow, the certainty that the ransomed soul, delivered from the burden of the flesh, had gone to live in the joy and felicity of His presence. Separation was but for a time. Reunion would come. Those left behind had but to wait. The day was not distant when, the full number of His elect being accomplished, the Lord would come in His kingdom, and they too, with all the faithful, dead or living, would enter with Him into the kingdom prepared for His blessed children from the foundation of the world, to receive there in His eternal and everlasting glory their perfect consummation and bliss, both in body and soul, through Jesus Christ the Lord.

Still there was sufficient hope in poor Minnie's death to support Ruth's soul on this sad day of her burial. And this hope had been greatly strengthened as she listened to that fifteenth chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians, which for long ages has brought comfort as well as teaching to the minds of many by the clearness with which it sets

forth the great truth of our dear Lord's humanity as the source of our own spiritual life in this world and our eternal life in the world to come.

The lesson ended, Ruth had risen from her seat to follow with the others to the grave, and as she did so, her eyes fell upon a sight which brought the colour quickly back into the face from which it had faded almost entirely.

Surely it was Richard Taylor. Yes, it was Richard Taylor. His eyes met hers, and a look passed between them at that moment such as Ruth had not dreamed could ever have been exchanged between her and one of the few persons on earth whom she had disliked—a look of mutual sorrow and sympathy and resignation.

They drew near to the grave together, and when they stood beside it, Ruth held out her hand to him. Though not one word had been exchanged between them, she felt that Richard Taylor was a changed man; and even without the grasp of his hand in return, she would have known by the sorrow on his face that there was one mourner at that grave whose grief was greater than her own. Yet every response was pronounced by him in a deep, distinct voice. Ruth, standing just a step in front, heard sounding in her ears fervent 'Amens' which went to her very soul. There was no mistaking their reality. No heart that was not fully and fervently sincere could have asked Christ's mercy in such tones, or have responded with such manifest faith and humility to every prayer the priest offered beside that open grave.

The service over, Mr. Prescott came up to Richard Taylor and shook hands with him. He, too, had been reading some of the history of the last few weeks without any help from words. They both joined Ruth, and they left the cemetery together.

'The Vicar was expecting to hear from you; we little dreamed of seeing you,' said Mr. Prescott.

'I came at once on receiving his letter. I had intended to change my course and sail for America before I heard from him. His letter decided me on returning to England as soon as possible. Most happily, a homeward-bound vessel touched at the port the very next day, and enabled me to carry my intention at once into execution.'

He hesitated a moment, and added:

'I had a great desire to see her again.' Then, after another pause, 'But no words can say how thankful I am to have been in time even for this.'

And then he asked for the poor little child—Alfred Dent's child—he, who only a few months ago had left his native land feeling that it would madden him ever to see a child of his in Minnie's arms. He asked about it now in tones of such real sympathy and sorrow, that it was indeed hard to believe that it was Richard Taylor who was speaking. Though he had said not a word of the change that had been wrought in him when he had passed from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, Mr. Prescott did not hesitate to reply:

'You will see her again in a better life than this, I trust.'

'Yes,' he said, 'I hope we shall be all together there. Even the sea shall give up its dead.'

And this was the only allusion to his mother's death he ever made to anyone.

Delivered out of his distress by the Lord, to whom he had cried in his trouble, healed by His word and saved from destruction, taught humbly to recognise both the power and the goodness of Him who rules and commands all things, who holds every cause in His own hand, and can as easily save by many as by few, he never for a moment disputed the Sovereign will of the Almighty God, who, when He drew him out of the waters that threatened to overwhelm him, had allowed them to close over his mother's head.

God had saved him by a marvellous deliverance, and it remained for him, the living, to praise Him, in the only way

in which a mortal man can praise his God, by devoting his life to His service, striving to glorify His name, and continually showing forth his thankfulness, not only by words, but by obedience to His holy commandments.

But he could not forget the dead; and all through his future life Richard Taylor went softly in remembrance of the mother whom he had lost.

There was one prayer which oftener than any other went up from his heart: it was the confession of sin provided by the Prayer-book for all whose consciences are burdened with the sense of it in their hearts, and the experiences of its consequences in their lives.

No wish had he to dispute the Sovereign will of Almighty God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in Him, his Father also, as well as his Maker and his Judge, who, for the sake of that dear Son, had had mercy upon him, and forgiven him all that was past. But the wrath and indignation which he had provoked God to send upon him by the manifold sins and wickedness which he had most grievously committed against Him left marks upon him which were never to pass away in this life. All through the long years of the future Richard Taylor acknowledged and bewailed the misdoings of which he had earnestly repented, yet for which he must always feel heartily sorry. To his dying day the remembrance of them was grievous unto him and the burden of them intolerable.

Meanwhile Helen Moorhouse, seeing Richard Taylor join Ruth and her husband, had herself lingered behind, purposely to leave him alone with them, and waited for her father. Taking his arm, she returned with him to the Vicarage, and as they did so they naturally talked of one subject only—the unexpected appearance of Richard Taylor in the church.

The Vicar had written to him immediately on seeing his name in the newspaper amongst the few saved from that

awful wreck, and learning his mother's loss by the few words that told that 'all females perished.'

To-day he had expected an answer to his letter, and to-day he had received it—in the tones of humble devotion of Richard Taylor's voice, in the lowly bent knee, in the look of deep, sorrowful, earnest contrition on the once hard face.

Letters were lying on the table when he came in; and whilst he was looking through them Helen turned, as was usual with her whenever interested or touched by any emotion, to the piano, and played over a favourite anthem which she had not played for years, but from some cause, which she herself could scarcely have defined, she felt it in her soul to play to-day.

As she sang the words, 'In the midst of life, we are in death,' she perceived that her father was standing beside her, tears in his eyes.

'You, too, are thinking of our darling,' she said. 'He loved this piece so much.'

'Yes,' he replied; 'I was remembering the day when I myself told him the origin of that noble anthem—how it could be traced back to the ninth century, when it was composed by a Swiss monk, the idea occurring to him by the thoughts which rose in his mind as he watched some workmen risking their lives over their occupation. I have often told you how that dear boy said, before I had time to say it myself, "Just like Shakespeare, grandfather, when he wrote the lines about the men who were gathering samphire on the Dover cliffs."'

As if in answer to some thought suggested by her father's words, Helen answered:

'Yes, death does indeed show God's displeasure for sin. I thought so to-day when this anthem was read, and I observed the expression of Richard Taylor's face. And another thought connected with him came into my mind when we were reading the lesson, a thought you and I,

father, have often discussed together, how everything that is truly to live has first to die. I almost think it is your favourite thought.'

'It certainly is one of which I myself have made experience, and the truth of which I have seen borne out in the experience of all those with whose spiritual life I am most intimate. "That which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die." It is our Lord's own teaching, Helen.'

'Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.'

How truly had this been realized to Helen in the death of the precious son on whom every earthly hope had centred; to Ruth, in the past discipline which had torn her heart so cruelly with disappointment, and in the present happiness which filled it almost to overflowing; and now to Richard Taylor, who had risen as it were from the grave of every ambition and desire he had ever known, a new man.

CHAPTER LI.

BURIAL OF THE DEAD.

Mr. Heathcote left the room, and Helen went on playing. Over and over again her fingers wandered almost as it seemed of themselves over the piano, whilst she sang the words of the noble anthem which ever since those long ago days of which her father had spoken have brought to the souls of men the solemn remembrance of their own mortality, and have caused many to send up a fervent cry from their sin-convinced souls to the Saviour of all men that He would plead for them with the most worthy Judge, so that they might, for His dear sake, be saved from the bitter pains of eternal death.

The music accorded perfectly with the solemn words, a mournful, wailing tune, to which Helen's full deep notes were well suited. Anyone listening to it that day would have easily understood why this music and these words should have served in Germany in the Middle Ages as a dirge at funerals and on other most mournful occasions. They might even have comprehended the superstitious feeling to which its effect upon the minds of men gave rise, and which grew to such an extent as to cause its use to be forbidden in the thirteenth century, except by express permission of the authorities of the Church.

Ruth experienced something of this feeling of awe,

as, coming up the staircase in the twilight, with the impressions of the day strong upon her, she paused for a moment at the door, listening to the words, 'Suffer us not at our last hour for any pains of death to fall from Thee.'

As she entered the room, Helen closed the piano and went to meet her.

And the two sisters, sitting over the fire in that twilight time, held together one of those long talks which were such a treat to both now that their distance from each other rendered them of rare occurrence.

'I have stayed too long,' said Ruth at last. 'You have made me forget how time was passing, and I promised Mrs. Abbott to be with her by six. She will be wondering what has become of me, for I rarely keep her waiting. Invalids always know what o'clock it is, and remember who has promised to come to see them.'

And Ruth hurried through the streets, always crowded at that hour, to the familiar little house on the hill, where she feared that her friend had been for some time expecting her—a familiar little house indeed, yet greatly changed since first Mrs. Job Taylor had taken up her abode there years ago.

She need not have hurried, however, for it was not, as usual, Mrs. Abbott's feeble voice that responded to her knock, and when she came into the room she found Mr. Abbott sitting by his wife's couch.

'Come in,' he said; 'Maggie has been hoping you would come before I was obliged to leave her. She wanted me to tell you our news myself—news which I think you will not be sorry to hear.'

'And which I am so glad you should hear to-day,' said Mrs. Abbott, holding out both her hands, and clasping tightly within them the hand which Ruth had extended in return. 'Guess what it is, Ruthie.'

'Is it that you are not going away,' said Ruth, thinking

at once of what news could possibly give her most happiness in connection with these dear friends.

'You clever little woman!' exclaimed Mrs. Abbott.

'I hope the wish was father to the thought,' added Mr. Abbott.

'But is it true?' asked Ruth—'really true?'

'Really true,' he answered. 'I have come home on purpose to tell Maggie. I only hope it has not over-excited her. She was foolish enough to cry over it at first.'

'For joy,' said Mrs. Abbott, 'for deep, deep joy. *You* know, Ruthie, how I dreaded leaving Little Burton, what it would have been to me to leave the place, and the people, and most of all, far beyond anything else, your father and his ministrations.'

'But how has it all happened?' Ruth asked, as she took mechanically the chair which Mr. Abbott had vacated, and fixed her eyes on her friend with quite a bewildered look in them. 'That is, if I may ask,' she added.

'Of course you may ask,' said Mr. Abbott; 'and I am glad that you should be the first friend whom I should tell. I dare say you know that there has been a committee formed of the creditors?'

'Yes,' said Ruth.

'And they have had a great many meetings on the subject of this unhappy bankruptcy, as I dare say you also know?'

'Yes,' again said Ruth, who knew well how often Mr. Abbott had been called to attend these meetings to supply statistics and give information, and show books, and explain accounts. Her friend had often told her what pain it had given his noble heart, wherein dwelt the charity which delighteth in covering faults rather than exposing them, to be obliged in the cause of truth to bring to light many facts which were so many proofs of the duplicity and dishonesty of his partner in America.

'There was a meeting held to-day,' Mr. Abbott continued. 'It promised to be a long one, as I told Maggie, and so I expect it will be. The committee are there still; but they did not keep me long. They have given me the happiness of exonerating me from all blame in this business. They have done me the honour of asking me to accept the management of these works, which are to be carried on for the benefit of the creditors.'

'And you have accepted?'

'Very thankfully, for my own sake and for theirs. You know, as Maggie says, what it will be to her to remain here—a fact which I was perfectly aware of, in spite of her artfulness in concealing it. And I know I can do more for the creditors than anyone else can, after all these years of experience. I am sure *you* know that if I were not convinced of this I should not have accepted this offer, even for the sake of the little wifie.'

Ruth's eyes were fixed now on him. She had often thought what a perfect index to his mind his face was in its simple, straightforward honesty of expression; in the clear, steady light that shone in his eyes; in the firm lines of his mouth; in the benevolent smile that played around it whenever the question was one of helping on the cause of goodness or of kindness.

But she had never been so much struck before as she was now with the expression which made his face, plain perhaps in feature, look to her quite beautiful.

This offer had evidently filled him with the deepest happiness. But there was no thought of self in his mind. No personal feeling either of pain or pleasure. To him there was no pain in the prospect of standing as manager where for years he had stood as master, of carrying out the orders of others instead of issuing his own, of rendering an account to those above him instead of having every account rendered to himself by those beneath him; nor did he feel any pride

in the honourable mention that had been made of his own conduct throughout, or in the praises that had been bestowed on his talents and tact as a most efficient man of business.

When a man recognises God as the Author and Giver of every good gift, and realizes in his personal experience his own utter insufficiency to be or to do anything of himself, his soul is too full of gratitude for there to be any room in it for self-gratulation.

'I must leave you now,' he added, 'to be very good company to each other, no doubt, considering how happy you both look.'

'And how happy we both are,' said Mrs. Abbott, as the door closed behind him. 'Oh, Ruthie, I can talk freely now of all that I have been keeping locked up in my heart.'

'But you will not be able to return to your own beautiful home,' said Ruth.

'Oh no, Ruth, it belongs to the creditors now. But I am glad to hear that there is some reason why it cannot be sold without great sacrifice. They will try to let it. But even if we could afford to rent it we would not do so. William was wishing that we could, for my sake; but I think I have convinced him that I would far rather remain here. I know how he longs to see every debt fully paid off, and so do I. We could save very little out of our present income if we returned to our own house. It requires a large establishment to keep it up, and William could not live so far from his business without keeping a carriage of some sort. But our expenditure here will be small, and we hope to save a good deal of money. I am glad, however, that it *is* to be let, not sold.'

'Because you hope to return to it one day?'

'I do not allow myself to hope anything,' she said; 'I dare not. And besides, Ruthie, we are so much happier when we do not. But I love the place very dearly, and I confess

I have a warm, happy feeling at heart that it is not to be sold. William has taken so much interest in it always, from the happy days when he used to spend hours beside my sofa, planning every corner and cupboard, and always with the one thought in his mind of my comfort and my enjoyment. Oh, Ruthie, was there ever such a man in all the world?'

The same answer rose to Ruthie's mind that had so often risen to it when her friend had before asked her the same question. But all she said was:

'He is indeed most unselfish.'

'Wonderfully, beautifully unselfish!' exclaimed Mrs. Abbott; 'he has no thought for himself. All his thought is for others.'

But it did not occur to her to think how much she herself was the cause of this wonderful, beautiful unselfishness. Not only by the example of her own patient self-renunciation, but by the very fact of her long, long invalidism, which, while she regretted it chiefly for his sake, because it deprived him of the help in his work and the companionship in his pleasures which every wife longs to render to the husband of her love, had really been the means of calling out by constant exercise, and bringing to such perfection, the self-forgetfulness which was so striking a feature in his character.

For years that sick-room had been to him, what a sick-room rarely is to any man, the centre of his interest. In his busiest hours of work he never forgot so to order his time as not to be a moment late in returning home, lest his wife should be made anxious. However many might be the interruptions that disturbed him during the day, none ever drove from his recollection the commissions he had undertaken to do for her, trifling though they might be. However heavily weighted was his mind, nothing ever made him forget the least arrangement he had planned for bringing some surprise to brighten his wife's sick-room, and

bring the smile to her face he loved so dearly to see there.

What wonder then, if, after living for long years a life of constant, loving thought for his wife, her wishes, her comfort, her happiness, he had ceased, as few men ever do, almost to have any wishes of his own.

Mrs. Abbott returned to the subject, which was so filling her own mind that it had for the moment driven every other from it.

'I have had many happy days,' she said, 'but I almost feel as if this were the happiest.'

Then, perceiving the look that passed over Ruth's face, she added, with a quick pang of very real self-reproach:

'And I am forgetting what a day it has been to you, my sweet Ruthie. I am afraid joy does make one selfish. But indeed I have truly sympathized with you. I have been very sorry for you.'

'I know you have,' said Ruth, 'and I am very glad for you. Mr. Abbott only spoke the truth when he said we both looked very happy. It has been a strange day of sunshine and sorrow, more than you think. I have a great deal to tell you also, only your tidings took away the thought of mine, and I must not be long over the telling now, or I shall be late in getting back to the Vicarage for dinner.'

And she related briefly to her friend the story of Richard Taylor's sudden appearance in the Church of S. Simon and S. Jude that morning, and as much of his conversation afterwards with herself and her husband as she would have thought it right to repeat to anyone.

'You would not know him again,' she said. 'I don't mean in appearance, though even that is wonderfully altered, merely by the different expression of the face; but he is altogether changed. His very heart is thawed. He told me so himself. He says that his selfish love for Minnie, the resolve he had to win her, the disappointment of his

non-success, the bitter resentment he felt against him who had succeeded where he had failed, were so many icebergs raised round his heart—icebergs which nothing but the warmth of the Saviour's forgiving, saving love, could ever have thawed. But this did melt them, changing them into a stream of love to Christ and to all and everyone for His sake. Most of all—oh Maggie, how wonderful it seems!—most of all to those whom most he hated. His heart is full of pity for that unhappy Alfred Dent, and he said that if he only had a home to offer her, his chief wish would be to adopt poor Minnie's motherless child, my dear little god-child, and devote the rest of his life to providing for her.'

'Poor little girl!' said Mrs. Abbott, 'poor little Ruth! I wonder what will become of her. There seems no hope of her father's life.'

'Very little, I believe,' replied Ruth. 'But that will only make her life an easier one. She will have a happy home with the Graingers. John is almost as fond of her as Esther, and Leonard and I will always look after her.'

CHAPTER LII.

ORDINATION.

Once more we see the beautiful Church of S. Simon and S. Jude filled with an interested crowd of worshippers, gathered together for a solemn ceremony which those who had spent their wealth in raising and adorning it had never expected to see performed within its walls—an ordination.

How far the Bishop had been led to appoint that this service should be held there out of his great regard for the venerable minister who still remained the Vicar of Little Burton, though many more important offices in the Church had been pressed upon him of late years, we cannot say. We only know that the ordination usually held in the cathedral of the diocese, eighty miles off, was to take place to-day in the Church of S. Simon and S. Jude, when the aged Vicar was to have the happiness of seeing his grandson, Godfrey Prescott, presented to the Reverend Father in God, to be admitted by him to the sacred office of a Deacon in that Holy Church of which he himself had been so faithful a minister during a period equal in length to the lives of most men—far longer than that of many. For more than sixty years had he remained stable and strong in his devoted fulfilment of the duties of the high office which he had been truly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon himself. From the solemn hour when he had stood before the Bishop, and in the sight of God and the congregation promised, by God's

help, to give his faithful diligence to minister the Doctrine and Sacraments and Discipline of Christ, as the Lord had commanded, the one object of his life had been the promotion of God's glory and the edification of His people.

No greed of lucre, no craving for the praise of man, no love of the world or the flesh had influenced him. The one desire of his pure soul had been to be his dear Lord's faithful messenger, watchman and steward; to teach and premonish, to feed and provide for His family; seeking to bring back into the fold the sheep that were dispersed abroad, for whom Christ had shed His blood, and whose life He had bought with His death; striving to reclaim the children wandering from their heavenly home in the midst of a naughty world, that they might be saved through Christ for ever.

The greatness of the treasure committed to his charge had ever remained printed in his remembrance.

As a father and grandfather, many domestic duties and trials had come to him, and through all he had sought to rule his family according to Christ's doctrine, very diligently, and, through God's blessing, so successfully, that all Little Burton would have been ready to acknowledge that the minister's family, as well as the minister himself, served as wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ.

But whilst thus caring for his own household, and seeking to maintain and set forward there as everywhere, as much as in him lay, quietness, peace and love, the Vicar's first thought had always been to wax riper and stronger in his ministry, and to give himself wholly to the service of that Church, who is the spouse and body of Christ. And though it never seemed to him as if he could labour enough in the exercise of his weighty office, so earnestly had he striven to sanctify his own life and the lives of those pertaining to him, after the rule and doctrine of Christ, so

faithfully had he set forth those holy Scriptures, which by constant reading and weighing had become his soul's daily food, that never, during the whole of his long ministry, had he given occasion of offence himself, or caused anyone to take hurt or hindrance by reason of his negligence; but rather had he given men occasion to glorify that holy God, who had allowed him to be the means of bringing hundreds of the souls committed to his charge into agreement with the faith and knowledge of God, and into the ripeness and perfectness of age in Christ.

And now that he was soon to lay aside the weapons which God's strength had given him the will and power to keep so bright for his Master's service, what joy and gratitude did it not inspire within him to feel that they would be taken up by the humble, modest, studious young grandson, whose appearance was so youthful that a stranger would scarcely have supposed him to have attained the necessary twenty-three years of age, and who was to kneel before the Bishop that day, that on his fair head, round which the curls still clustered almost as in his infancy, might be laid the hands which were to give him authority to exercise the sacred office of a deacon in the Church of God.

A very solemn time was that to the two sisters, who side by side in the Vicarage pew were present at the ceremony—Godfrey Prescott's mother and his aunt Helen. Perhaps even more so to the latter than to the former.

It carried her back, almost more than anything had ever done before, to the early days of her motherhood, when the chief of all the hopes she had formed for her only son was that he might one day be admitted to the Holy Orders of a Deacon and a Priest—even, had she fondly dared to hope, of a Bishop.

To this day she remembered a visit she had paid to old David Graham, carrying to him Harold's school reports, and also a letter from the Doctor to Mr. Moorhouse, giving

his own account of the boy's extraordinary proficiency, and his special love for the study of theology.

The blind pensioner had listened with clasped hands and head bent eagerly forward, and then had said :

'Mark my words, Miss Helen, mark my words. Old David Graham won't be here to see it, but the lad will live to be a Bishop. He will have all the qualifications needful to fill the three sacred orders of ministers in Christ's Church. I often think of those three solemn orders, and what a privilege it is to us who are under these spiritual pastors and masters to know that they have all three existed from the time of the Apostles themselves. Our Lord called the Apostles. They chose other godly men full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom to help them, and so it has gone on ever since, and I believe you will see that dear lad filling every one of those sacred orders.'

The words had taken a strange hold on Helen's mind. Many times did they return to it during this day's ceremony.

As the Archdeacon presented to the Bishop those who desired to be ordained, declaring, in response to his admonition, that he had inquired of them and examined them, and knew them all to be apt and meet, by their learning and conversation, to exercise their ministry duly to the honour of God and the edifying of His Church, she imagined she could see her own son standing amongst them, and realized that there would indeed have been no impediment to keep back one whose early life had given such rich promise of future fitness, both by instruction in doctrine and innocency of life, to serve faithfully in the ministry of Christ's Church. As the Bishop ministered to one after another the oath of the Queen's sovereignty, she thought to herself how her loyal-hearted son would have entered into its fullest meaning. She remembered the look on her darling's face, the very tone of his voice, as in that same church, years ago, he had

resolutely answered 'I do' to the questions put to him at his Confirmation; and in imagination, as one after another searching question was addressed to those about to be ordained, in a form which made the answers to partake of the nature of solemn oaths, she heard her son answering 'I will' in yet more manly tones. But these were imaginations, and there was a reality—a far more blessed reality than anything her fondest hopes could ever have conceived for the son of her great love. God had called him to a higher ministry than any to which he could have attained on earth. No stain could ever soil the spotless robe he wore. No taint of earth could ever defile the perfect pureness of soul with which he ministered in his Master's service. His courage could never fail; his spirit could know no discouragement. Free from all mortal weakness, and beyond the reach of the touch of temptation, with the powers of his intellect fully developed, with a knowledge of God's glory and Christ's love not to be reached on earth, and a fervour of devotion only known by those who have realized the full danger of perils past, and the full bliss of joy and rest in Paradise, he was serving his Saviour and ministering in His Church unceasingly, perfectly, without let or hindrance, with no possibility of retrogression, but a blessed certainty of constant progress in love and knowledge.

By one of those happy coincidences which so often occur, this day was a double festival in the aged Vicar's home—for it was also his own 'golden-wedding day'—and his children and grandchildren had gathered round him to celebrate the two great family events with almost equal thankfulness.

A good deal changed most of them are since last we saw them, yet in none is the change sufficiently great to prevent very easy recognition, as on the evening of this day we see them all assembled in the Vicarage drawing-room.

'Winifred will give us a song,' said Mrs. Heathcote, observing that the flow of happy talk from so many tongues had brought a look of fatigue upon her husband's face, 'and then you must go to rest.'

So Winifred went to the piano, and in a clear, rich voice, which proved that one of her mother's gifts had descended to her in all its fulness, sang the old, yet ever new ballad, 'Darby and Joan.'

'Come here and kiss me, child,' her grandfather said, as she rose from the piano; 'who told you to choose that song?'

'I told myself, grandpapa,' she answered, as she knelt by his side, with her blue eyes looking laughingly into his, which were filled with tears, and her thick wavy masses of auburn hair falling over his hands. 'I told myself. Mother says she *loves* to hear me sing that song, because it is *exactly* like you and grandmamma, and so it was the best song I *could* sing to-night—was not it?'

'It was,' he replied; 'God bless you, dear.'

And, rising from his chair, he took his wife's arm and wished them good-night.

'Always the same,' Winifred heard him say, as she held the door open for them.

And had it not been closed again, she might have heard her grandmother add:

> '"Hand in hand when our life was May,
> Hand in hand when our hair is gray,
> Shadow and sun for ev'ry one as the years roll on,
> Hand in hand when the long night-tide
> Gently covers us side by side."'

'You must put away all these pretty things, Winifred,' said Mr. Moorhouse, as the girl came back into the room. 'Some of them are much too valuable to be left out at night.'

And he went himself to assist in restoring to their cases the various gifts—several of them of pure gold—that had

lain all day on the drawing-room table for the admiration of the many visitors, who, after the lunch at Mr. Abbott's, had come to the Vicarage with their double congratulations.

'I really think grandmamma liked these the best of all,' said Winifred, holding in her hand the pair of silver-gilt table napkin-rings on which was engraved: 'The gift of the Vicarage servants to their honoured master and mistress.' And then she added, with a merry laugh and an emphasis of intonation which showed that it was indeed the same Winifred as ever, 'Oh, father, shall you *ever* forget seeing Hannah present that gift?'

'Dear old Hannah!' remarked Godfrey. 'She owes it to me that she had that honour. Barker is a good fellow, but he was rather inclined to stand on his dignity as butler and consider that it belonged to him, but I made him see that Hannah had been years longer in the family than any of them, and that she, and no one else, was to be spokeswoman.'

'You are Hannah's own boy still, Godfrey,' his cousin answered, 'though you are an ordained clergyman.'

'And always shall be,' he answered; 'there never was such another good old girl in the world, I believe. But I don't quite think the servants' gift was the most appreciated of all.'

'In one way perhaps it was,' said Mrs. Prescott; 'but I think, children, that this gift of yours went home to both their hearts more than any other.'

And she laid her hand on a gold-clasped Bible of large type, with a few lines written in it by Frances, saying that it was 'A token of the truest love and gratitude from Winifred Moorhouse, and Godfrey and Frances Prescott, to their beloved grandparents on their golden-wedding day.' A golden day it had indeed been.

'A day without a cloud,' had been Mrs. John Grainger's remark upon it, as after having had the never-to-be-forgotten

delight of seeing the Bishop's hands laid upon the head of her former little charge, and joined with him and so many others near and dear to her in the Holy Communion, she had gone with her children to spend the rest of the day at the Vicarage, and returned home in time to be at supper with John. For Esther was one of those wives—would there were more of them—who if possible never allow themselves to be absent from their home when their husbands are in it.

'It has been a day without a cloud, John,' she said.

'And this is not likely to bring one into it,' he replied, taking a letter from his pocket.

'A letter from Richard Taylor!' she exclaimed, recognising the writing. 'And what a long one! Richard seldom writes long letters.'

'He has not often so much to write about,' replied John.

'News of Ruth, father?' inquired a rosy little maiden, coming very close to him, with a face full of eagerness to hear tidings of the distant Ruth, who had been for many years as a sister to her.

'Yes, there is news of Ruth in it, Fanny. But the chief news is of one whom you know nothing about, and of whom mother and I have been hoping to hear something for a very long time.'

'Not Mr. Job Taylor, John?' exclaimed Esther. 'Dick has not found his father?'

'Indeed he has, Esther; he has found him in that very hospital which we were so glad to hear he had begun to visit.'

And Esther listened with deepest interest, Fanny paying almost equal attention, whilst John Grainger read the letter, which told of the providential manner in which, after long search, Richard Taylor had found his father. Or rather in which Job Taylor had found his son; for had he not recognised Richard, Richard might perhaps not have recognised him, so utterly broken down and changed was the once proud, pompous man.

Three months ago Richard Taylor, having, as he hoped, traced his father to Columbus, had taken up his abode there with his wife, and the little adopted maiden, Ruth Dent, who was to them both as a daughter. There, whilst visiting one day the accident-ward in the hospital, he found a fresh bed in it, occupied by a 'stranger,' and was experiencing a bewildered feeling at the sight of the wretched, haggard-looking old man lying in it, when his own name, or rather the word 'Dick' was uttered, and he recognised his father. Very little could Richard Taylor have told his friend—for such John Grainger had become —of the many changes, all for the worse, that his father had experienced since suspicions of dishonesty had caused him to lose his first employment. All he could learn himself of these changes had been that the last had found him a common porter in a warehouse in Columbus. As such he had been one day taken out into the country to fetch some furniture from a house twenty miles distant. The road was so wild that it took longer to get to their destination than had been expected, and the men felt somewhat anxious for their necks at returning in the dark through such country; but their employer was urgent. Information had been given him that a distraint would probably be put into the house next morning, and he was determined to remove his goods from it before this happened. The driver was as venturesome as American drivers are wont to be, and at twilight they had started on their homeward route, to be overtaken by darkness whilst still pursuing their dangerous course, at one time through heavy swamps and bogs, at others over the trunks of trees thrown together in such a way as to make some kind of road, until, as they were suddenly turning a sharp corner, a jolt in the dark had sent the van, horses and men into a swamp. Stunned at first by the blow, Job Taylor had only recovered consciousness to feel himself to be suffocating, smothered, as it seemed

to him, under the pressure of some tremendous weight; and so indeed it proved. For help having been procured from the nearest hut by the other men, who had been thrown out unhurt, it was discovered that underneath one of the horses, both of which were seriously injured, lay Job Taylor, with scarcely any breath left in him. With the first light of morning he was carried into the town and to the hospital, and there, on the following Sunday, his son found him, and just a week later closed his eyes in death, after hearing him offer one short cry to God to have mercy upon his soul.

These were the tidings contained in Richard Taylor's letter to his friend, with an added postscript saying that Esther's wish was likely to be gratified, for now that his object in returning to America was attained, his one desire was to get back to Little Burton, and make his home there.

'Mr. Abbott will give him employment, I know,' said John; 'he told me a few days ago that he wished he had just such a first-rate man of business to be always on the spot, now that he is once more settled at Westonbridge.'

Some idea suddenly suggested to Esther's mind brought a smile to her face, and John inquiring into its cause, she said:

'I was only thinking that Mr. Abbott's name rather than Mr. Taylor's might have been Job.'

'On account of the patience he has shown through all his trials,' John answered.

'Not so much on account of that, John, as on account of the reward he has received. It really is with him as it was with Job: the Lord has blessed his latter end more than the beginning. They were saying so at the Vicarage to-day.'

And in so saying they had but said what was true. Mr. Abbott was a yet wealthier man than he had been before the failure of the Little Burton Works. His expenditure had been small during the years that he had been working

the business for the creditors, and this he had done so successfully that, thanks to his energetic management, it had of late years become more lucrative than ever before, and, all liabilities being discharged, was once more his own property. To him John Grainger carried Richard Taylor's letter the morning after he had received it, and by Mr. Abbott's request left it with him.

'I shall write to him at once,' he said to his wife, after reading its contents to her, 'and I shall offer him a post in the office. I can thoroughly trust him, and now that I am growing an older man every day, and that your improved health is making you a younger woman, I often wish to be a little more free from work.'

'So that we may drive out more together, and have more time to give to the garden,' she answered. 'Oh, how lovely it is to be here again in our own beautiful home!'

'A beautiful home it seems indeed,' he replied, 'after our long absence from it, and our long sojourn in that small house on the hill.'

'And yet we were very happy there, William.'

'I wonder where you and I would *not* be happy,' he said, 'so long as we are together.'

And then he added:

'I have been thinking, Maggie, of offering that house to Richard Taylor if he accepts this post, which I have no doubt he will do. You know I have the lease of it for two more years, and the situation would just suit him. His mother spent so much money on it, that it would be a satisfaction to feel that he was benefiting by all the improvements she made in it.'

'Would not the house be too full of associations of the past?' she asked.

'I don't think so,' he answered; 'not with a man of Taylor's character. The good has so completely overcome the evil, such manifest blessings have arisen from the

sorrows, such fair flowers, if I may so speak, have grown out of the soil in which the sins were buried, that I think if Richard Taylor likes to make the place his home, his prevailing feeling would be one of thankfulness.'

And so it proved.

Six months afterwards Richard Taylor and his bright young American wife, who had won the hearts of all his friends at Little Burton by her goodness and gentleness, and of one or two very specially by a striking resemblance in her personal appearance to Minnie Davis, were settled in the house on the hill with their adopted daughter, Ruth Dent, and there was not a happier family in all the district of Little Burton.

THE END.

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